



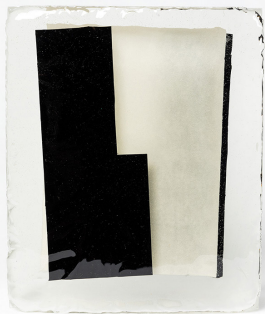
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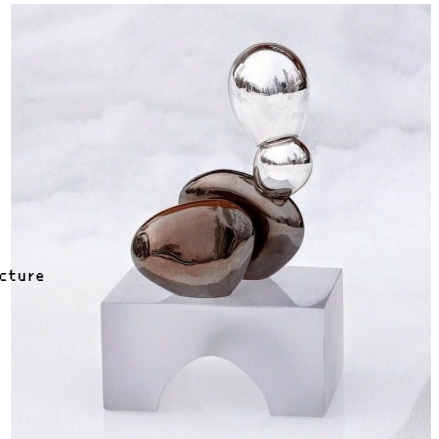
In-between

Mapping the Mediators
of
Contemporary Craft



Kati Peltola
Master's Thesis

Contemporary Design programme
Department of Design
Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture



The cover of this
thesis is curated by
online gallery
Finnish Spirit
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Artists:

1. Heidi Anniina Mattila, "Play"
acrylic and spray on canvas
100 x 80 cm, 2018

2. Jussi Goman, "On A String"
acrylic on canvas
Photo by Angel Gil

3. Vesa-Pekka Rannikko, "Khaupas"
pigment-dyed plaster
43 x 20 x 18cm
Photo by Jussi Tiainen

4. Inka Bell, "Z-L"
colored paper and epoxy
25x21x11cm, 2017-18

5. Manuela Bosco "Space Your Mind"
acrylic on canvas
180 x 280 cm

6. Inka Bell "VARIABLE XIV [Synchronicity]"
Screen print, Edition of 7
76 x 112 cm, 2016

7. Jukka Rusanen "Alku"
linen, cotton, jute and acrylic, hand weaved
330 x 210 x 30 cm, 2019

8. Heikki Viinikainen "Pupusilta"
glass
h 19,5 cm, 2019



In-between

Mapping the Mediators
of
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Kati Peltola
Master of Arts Thesis, 30 ECTS

Contemporary Design programme
Department of Design
Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture

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Helsinki, 2020

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Author Kati Peltola

Title of thesis In-between - Mapping the Mediators of Contemporary Craft

Department Department of Design

Degree programme Contemporary Design

Year 2020 **Number of pages** 89 **Language** English

Abstract

This thesis maps the contemporary craft mediators in Helsinki, which make up an interconnected fabric of networking, influence, and value-making. A mediator is an individual or an organization promoting the artists operating between professional networks, collectors and the general public. My research is tied to the current time and works as a snapshot of the contemporary craft and design community. It aims to analyze the role of mediating agents within these spheres. Contemporary craft makers can identify as artists or designers, but they must become entrepreneurs for their livelihood. The mediator's main role is to free-up creative time for these artists and designers by taking on some of the entrepreneurial tasks. This thesis is a tool for understanding the field of contemporary craft for a wider audience, but serves also as an investigation of how to place myself within it.

I begin my analysis with framing the concepts which will be discussed in this thesis. What or who is a mediator in the context of contemporary craft? What does contemporary craft or design even mean? This is done by using existing literature to define the terminology around these subjects. I continue by discussing the Finnish mediator in different contexts of time and place, in history, abroad, online and in the future. In the fifth chapter, I map the current mediators in Helsinki. I introduce mediators in the for-profit and non-profit sectors, and arrange the information gathered to make sense of the scattered and often introverted design bubble. Finally, I introduce three mediators as case studies and study them through semi-standardized interviews.

Mediating is a value based vocation. This thesis examines mediators, whose work is based on inbetweenness and polarities in many ways; they are physically between the artist, professional networks, collectors and general public but also facilitating in between the notions of making a living and living for making for artists. There is a genuine desire to help young designers, but with limited financial resources. Contemporary craft is not a highly profitable market, yet it is treated as a commercial practice. In the end, the purpose of this thesis is to discuss the value of contemporary craft within fine arts at large. I question the need for hierarchies and imagine possible future directions for the practice of mediation within art, design and craft, which is undeniably needed, but currently only fuelled by the personal motivations of independent agents.

Keywords Contemporary craft, Contemporary design, Mediating, Curating, Entrepreneurship

Tekijä Kati Peltola

Työn nimi In-between - Mapping the Mediators of Contemporary Craft

Laitos Muotoilun laitos

Koulutusohjelma Contemporary design

Vuosi 2020 **Sivumäärä** 89 **Kieli** Englanti

Tiivistelmä

Tämä maisterin opinnäytetyö kartoittaa nykykäsityötaiteen välittäjiä Helsingissä. Välittäjällä viitataan henkilöihin, tai organisaatioihin jotka työskentelevät taiteilijan, ammattilaisverkostojen, taiteen keräilijöiden ja yleisön välillä, tukien taiteilijan työtä. Tutkimukseni on ajankohtainen katsaus nykyhetken käsityötaiteen ja muotoilun kentälle ja sen sisällä työskenteleviin välittäjiin. Itse tekijät voivat identifioitua taiteilijaksi tai muotoilijaksi, mutta heitä usein yhdistävä nimittäjä on yrittäjyys. Välittäjäroolin tärkeys korostuu, kun työtehtävät jotka taiteilijat mielellään ulkoistaisivat muille, vievät aikaa itse luovasta työstä. Ensijaisesti opinnäytetyössäni pyrin ymmärtämään käsityötaiteen kenttää ja jäsentämällä kenttää pyrin asettamaan myös itseni kentälle. Toivon, että työ voisi toimia myös avuksi laajemmalle yleisölle.

Aloitan analyysini rajaamalla työssä käytettävät termit. Kuka oikeastaan on välittäjä ja nykykäsityötaiteen kontekstissa ja mitä nykykäsityötaide oikeastaan tarkoittaa? Tässä apuna on käytetty alan kirjallisuutta. Jatkan tutkimusta asettamalla välittäjän eri aika- ja paikkakonteksteihin, ja pohdin suomalaisen käsityötaiteenvälittäjän roolia historian ja tulevaisuuden näkökulmista, sekä kansainvälisyyden ja ei-aineellisessa kontekstissa, kuten verkossa. Viidennessä kappaleessa kartoitan nykyisiä välittäjiä Helsingissä, sekä yleishyödyllisten ja voittoa tavoittelevien organisaatioiden sektoreilla. Tarkoituksena on järjestää ja selkeyttää välittäjien verkostoa, joka toimii jo muutenkin pirstaloituneella ja sisäänpääntäytyneellä muotoilun kentällä. Viimeiseksi esittelen kolme välittäjää esimerkkitapauksina käyttäen kerättyä haastatteluaineistoa.

Välittäjäntyo on arvopohjaista. Tässä opinnäytteessä tutkin välittäjiä, jotka asettuvat taiteilijan, ammattilaisverkostojen, taiteen keräilijöiden sekä yleisön välimaastoon, mutta ovat myös osa koko taidekäsityökentän väliinpuotoamista. Käsityötaide erotetaan käsitteenä esimerkiksi nykyaiteesta ja mielletään usein lähemmäksi liiketoimintaa. Tämä johtaa tilanteeseen, jossa välittäjät joutuvat tekemään työtään hyvin pienillä resursseilla. Tutkimuksessani päädyn pohtimaan taidekäsityön arvotusta taiteen sisällä. Onko hierarkiat todella tarpeellisia ja minkälaisia suuntia koko välittäjäkunta voisi tulevaisuudessa ottaa? Välittäjätyön tärkeys tunnistetaan, mutta tällä hetkellä se toimii yksittäisten tekijöiden henkilökohtaisen motivaation voimalla.

Avainsanat Nykyaidekäsityö, Nykymuotoilu, Taiteen välittäminen, Kuratointi, Yrittäjyys

Acknowledgements

Thank you for your support, knowledge and big hearts.

Kaisu Savola
Julia Lohmann
Caoimhe Isha Beaulé
Mimi McPartlan
Noora Leinikka

Krista Kosonen
Elina Aalto
Katja Hagelstam
Hannakaisa Pekkala
Katarina Siltavuori
Tero Kuitunen

Family

+ Mimi, Mare, Sara & Matilda for all the
conversations over a juice box.

Preface

As I started to think about my thesis subject, I found myself often pondering the relationship and hierarchies of fine arts and contemporary craft. The subject is so vast and maybe not even that interesting by itself, but I found that in the end, this thesis is constantly surrounding these themes. Contemporary craft falls often “in between”. It is not a form of art that gets the full support of art institutes, yet it has commercial expectations and is not a form of art that people are willing to spend money on. In the end, these hierarchies are artificially created social constructions. I have found myself in conversations where I get defensive when contemporary craft is talked down, or questioned based on the materiality, or the commerciality of it. I noticed that I was gravitating towards mediators, who are focused on contemporary craft but do not necessarily make a big difference between fine arts, design or contemporary craft. They value the handmade quality, are able to explain the importance of it to others, and do it with empathy and sincere need to help others, especially young artists. I make glass jewelry and sculpture, and have noticed that there is an interest from the general public in the handmade. The current ecosystem of design is a little mysterious even for me. Let this thesis be my attempt to understand it a little better.

Introduction

The Helsinki design scenery is small but vibrant, scattered and fairly introverted. We were the World Design Capital in 2012, we have Helsinki Design Week, and the Design District. For a medium-sized capital, the scene is dynamic, and the general public appreciate design and handicraft. The rallying point for underlying networks can be vaguely placed on art and design schools, such as Aalto University. There are associations, businesses and non-profit organizations all attempting to keep the relevance of design in the public discussion, but for the general public, it might be sometimes hard to grasp what does design even mean in the context of Helsinki. For the newly graduating design student, the scenery is more familiar, but the future seems uncertain; where do we go from here and could someone help us? There is a large, but ununified group of people who are creating opportunities for young designers, of which I am referring to as mediators.

While these mediators are not necessarily recognized as a specific group of people, the importance of art mediators is undeniable. For example, they are briefly mentioned in several interview-based articles in the professional press. Projecting to the history, a Finnish textile artist, ceramist and academic Vuokko Eskolin-Nurmesniemi discusses the importance of mediator roles in an interview in Ornamo magazine (4/2019);

At the time there was Gummerus (Chair of Finnish Society of Crafts and Design, Herman Olof Gummerus), who uplifted the Finnish applied art industry¹ in the Milan Triennale. He was the master, who pushed us forward. He paved the way to Milan, he opened all the doors.²

¹ In Finnish: Taideteollisuus

² "Vuokko: Minä aloitin designin," Ornamo, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.ornamo.fi/fi/artikkeli/vuokko-mina-aloitin-designin/>

"Silloin oli Gummerus (taideteollisuusyhdistyksen puheenjohtaja Herman Olof Gummerus), joka nosti Suomen taideteollisuuden triennaalissa. Hän oli se mestari, joka vei eteenpäin. Hän petasi Milanon valmiiksi, hän avasi kaikki ovet"

Translated from Finnish by Kati Peltola.

Herman Olof Gummerus will be discussed later in this thesis as an example of mediation work. While Eskolin-Nurmesniemi underlined the importance of an art mediator in the 1950's, so does Laura Väre, the young designer of the year 2019, in the same Ornamo magazine (4/2019);

It would be a nice situation, if at some point I wouldn't have to sell my know-how, but I would be contacted directly.³

This quote embodies the notion of wanting to focus on the creating, without having to perform the sales activities. In the same article Väre is showing her gratitude to a new business Young Finnish Design-concepts' founders Elisa Luoto and Heidi Huovinen. They are both Aalto University alumni helping emerging furniture designers to find producers for their projects. Laura Väre's products are currently promoted by these mediators.

The mediator roles and their importance are examined in an historical context as well as today's context. My research is focused on the agents in the design field and more specifically on the mediators who are promoting contemporary craft and design. It is my attempt to map out the field in Helsinki - by whom and what kind of mediation work is done to advocate for young designers. I was curious to find out how valuable mediation work is, and what are some of the motivations of mediators to do this type of work. The word 'art mediator' carries a heavy load, but in this research, it is excluding other visual and performing art mediators and consequently focusing only on contemporary craft, small-scale producers and unique object craft-artists. I am also excluding furniture making, or not focusing on their mediation, as I feel it has a world of its own, and it is not within my profound interest.

In the light of the currents of the field, this thesis reflects the multiple roles and desires of the makers and attempts to see if they meet within the design field. Today's designers can call themselves either an artist or a designer, but above all, they are defined by being entrepreneurs. What portion of the entrepreneurial work takes from the creative work, is it in balance, and what are some of the tasks that the mediators take over when attempting to bring forward the new makers? If we are trained to become 'contemporary designers', which essentially means becoming a freelancer or

³ "Kivojen ihmisten kollektiivi," Ornamo, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.ornamo.fi/fi/artikkeli/kivojen-ihmisten-kollektiivi/>

"Olisi kiva tilanne, jos jossakin vaiheessa minun ei tarvitsisi myydä osaamistani, vaan minuun otettaisiin yhteyttä."

Translated from Finnish by Kati Peltola.

an entrepreneur, does our education prepare us for that? What kind of roles can the mediator take in this situation?

This thesis explores the mediators of contemporary craft in Helsinki. In the context of this thesis, a mediator is a person who works in the field of contemporary craft in-between the young designer, artists, professional networks, art collectors, and the general public. The mediation work consists of, for example, offering a space for exposure, promoting the artist and connecting networks. The research is tied to the current time and place. It is a snapshot of a state of things - a scattered and somewhat introverted fabric of the contemporary craft and design community. It is most of all a personal attempt to understand the field and place my own practice in it, but also work as a tool for understanding for a wider audience, including the art or design student, recent graduate and the general public. This thesis does not assume that the reader is already familiar with the complexities of today's maker and the contemporary craft field, and hopes to even decode some possibly existing suppositions that an observer might have.

I found that these questions were overlooked in the current academic context, and therefore would be suitable for a master's thesis topic. My research was guided by the main question: what or who is a contemporary craft mediator in the context of Helsinki, 2020? The aim of this paper is to shed light on this matter and understand the motivations, aspirations and operations of these mediators. The thesis is structured as follows: in chapter 2 I will firstly discuss the concepts, framing the scope of the thesis. In chapter 3 I am focusing on the methodology and structure, after which chapter 4 & 5 are analysis and exploration of the mediation in different contexts of time and place. In chapter 6, I am presenting my case studies. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis with final reflections.

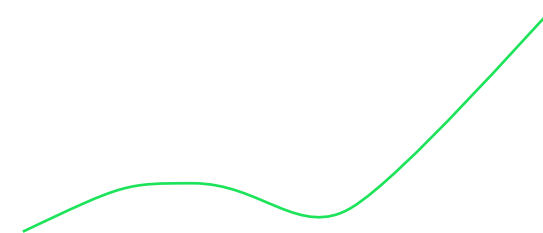
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Literature review - Veräjänkorva and Ihatsu discussing art, craft and design

In this chapter I am looking into two Finnish scholars and their writing about the terminology of craft, design, and art. Due to the specific geographical location of this research, it was important to look into research done in Finnish and specifically in regards to the Finnish creative field. This is important, as this thesis is written in English, but focuses on a Finnish cultural setting with its own semiotics and pragmatics.

Anna-Marja Ihatsu examines the notions of craft, design, and art in comparison to each other, but also in comparison to Finnish and English languages in a research report "Craft, Art-Craft or Craft-Design? In pursuit of the British equivalent for the Finnish concept *käsityö*." Ihatsu uses the term 'handicraft' to explain her concept of *käsityö*.⁴ In this thesis, I am also referring to *käsityö* as handicraft.

⁴ Anna-Marja Ihatsu, *Craft, Art-Craft or Craft-Design?: in Pursuit of the British Equivalent for the Finnish Concept 'käsityö'* (Joensuu: Joensuu yliopisto, 1998), 44.



To determine the territories of handicraft, she has drawn a cross-sectional diagram to explain her division of the terms. (see fig.1) I am using her diagram to also place my research within the territories. My focus area, “handicraft and art industry” is marked in blue, the concept of handicraft within its core, marked in yellow.

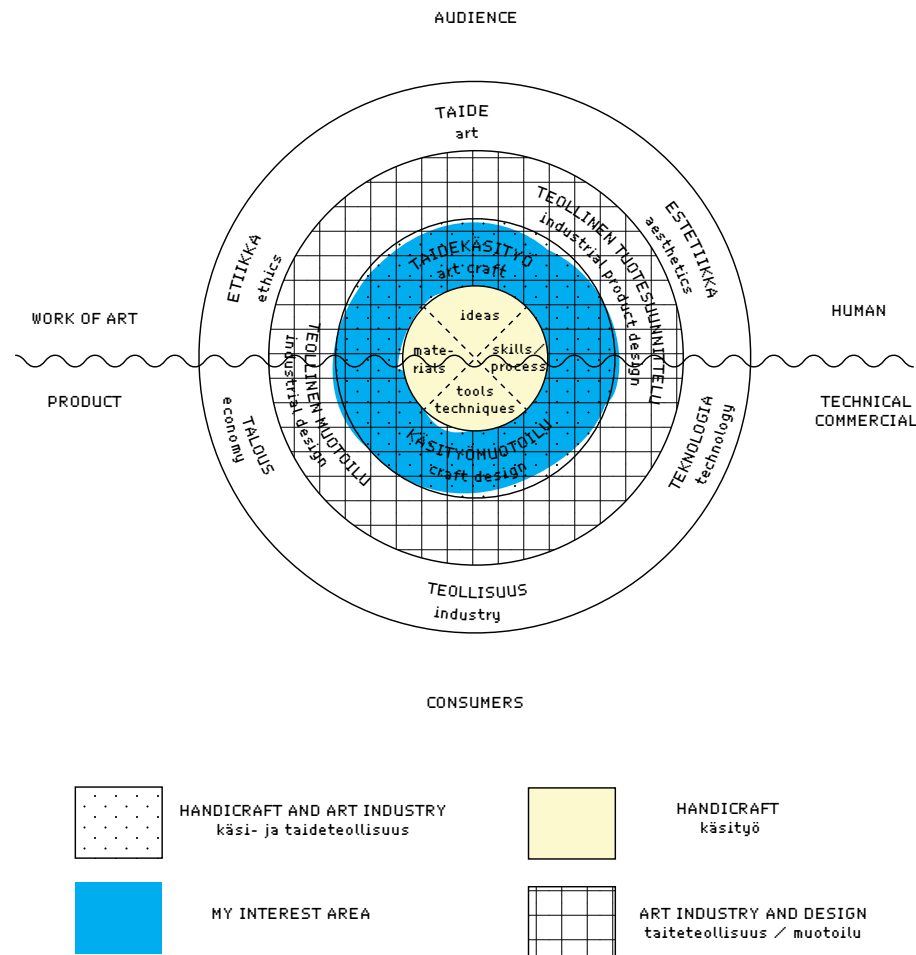


Fig. 1 A diagram of the worlds of Finnish handicraft and its surroundings by Anna-Marja Ihatsu⁵

⁵ Anna-Marja, Ihatsu. *Craft, Art-Craft or Craft-Design?: in Pursuit of the British Equivalent for the Finnish Concept 'käsityö'* (Joensuu: Joensuu yliopisto, 1998.), 44, fig.1.

To further discuss contemporary craft and its relationship with art and design, Ihatsu has drawn a triangular figure “The world of contemporary craft with its two dimensions” (see fig 2) to explain that craft can borrow either from fine arts or from design. She suggests that contemporary craft practice stretches into two extremes of “the avant-garde craft” and “conventional craft”.⁶ Ihatsu continues, that the “avant-garde craft” further divides into “art-craft” and “craft-design”. Whereas art-craft appreciates the conventions of “art”, craft-design produces more everyday objects. She argues fine arts and design offer different things to craft; fine arts offers ideas, aesthetics, individuality, free expression and an intuitive way of working, whereas design offers functionality, customer service, problem solving, rational analysis and technology.⁷

In both cases the maker is personally responsible from the design to production of the goods. Although her research manages to organize, the terms art-craft and craft-design seem a little too raw to use in my thesis. In this thesis, the term contemporary craft encapsulates those two dimensions.

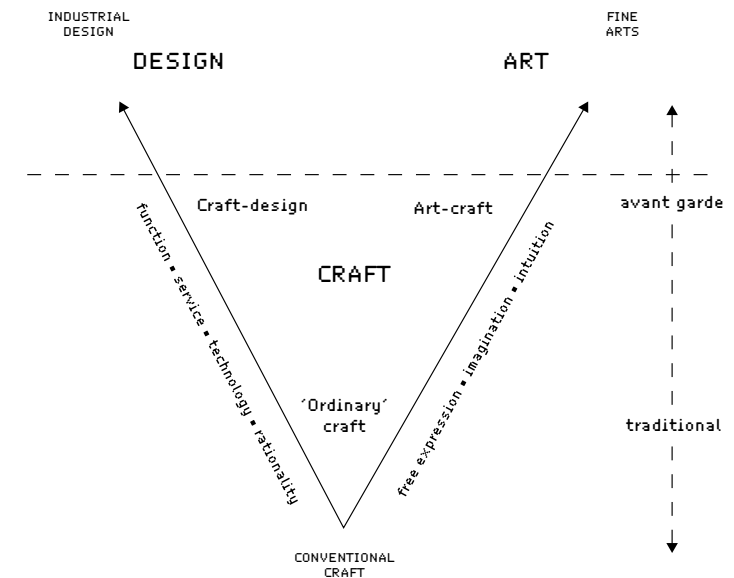


Fig. 2 The world of ‘contemporary craft’ with its two dimensions by Anna-Marja-Ihatsu⁸

⁶ Ihatsu, abstract, iv.

⁷ Ihatsu, 157.

⁸ Ihatsu, 156, fig. 2.

Lastly, especially to the Finnish speaking readers of this thesis, I compare the two languages using Ihatsu's figure. (see fig.3) The following figure explains the Finnish and British English equivalents also used in this thesis. The figure below demonstrates that the emphasis of them are slightly different.

FINNISH	BRITISH ENGLISH
Muotoilu	Design
Käsityö	Handicraft
	Craft
Taidekäsityö	Crafts

Fig. 3 An example of the zones of purports for 'craft' and 'käsityö' by Anna-Marja Ihatsu⁹

Tiina Veräjänkorva has prepared a report of the state of Finnish crafts¹⁰ in conjunction with the National Council for Design in 2007. This diagnosis of craft delves into the discourses and crossroads of art, design, and crafts. Veräjänkorva has translated the term "crafts" in Finnish to *taidekäsityö*. I will be following her example in my thesis, as I found it reflects my own thoughts on the matter; in this thesis craft can be translated into *taidekäsityö*. While some of the information is outdated, she is discussing a lot of the same topics as this thesis. It also goes to show that these questions are still in flux and require constant examining. In her attempt to define what is craft, she uses several existing attempts to define terminology, and comes to the conclusion that craft is a spectrum of several terms. Within craft, or alongside coexist design, handicraft, craft design, and contemporary craft.

⁹ Ihatsu, 124, fig 3.

¹⁰ Veräjänkorva Tiina, *Diagnoosi taidekäsityöstä - Tarkastelussa Taiteen, Muotoilun Ja käsityön Rajapinta*, Tiina Veräjänkorva (Helsinki: Taiteen keskustoimikunta, 2007).

Veräjänkorva opens her understanding of contemporary craft and translates this term into *nykytaidekäsityö*.¹¹ It encompasses the notion of the current time and craft, but also contemporary art. 'Nyky' means present, or current in this case. She argues that contemporary craft comprises, in its traditional setting ceramic and glass art, textile art, metal and jewelry art.¹² However, she notes that the material spectrum is expanding and in the present day, it also includes newer areas such as paper art or recycled materials. I would also suggest that today, it can also include future materials, such as biomaterials. Veräjänkorva continues that contemporary craft can be seen as twofold; on one end as contemporary art and on the other end, small production of craft objects. These two realms work differently, but their discourses are connected to contemporary art, design, craft, and entrepreneurship.¹³ Her understanding of the word contemporary craft is very much the same as mine in this thesis. However, the term *nykytaidekäsityö* in Finnish is a very heavy one, and almost too complex to be used in everyday discussion.

¹¹ Nykytaide = contemporary art, taidekäsityö = crafts, käsityö = handicraft Nyky = present

¹² Veräjänkorva, 19.

¹³ Veräjänkorva, 19.



Fig 4. At Ornamo Art & Design Sale. Photographed by Minna Kurjenluoma (2020) From Ornamo, <https://www.ornamo.fi/fi/artikkeli/ornamon-teosmyynnin-satoa/>.

2.1 Framing the concepts used in this thesis

In this section, I am defining the concepts of contemporary craft, contemporary craft mediation and will discuss the notions of artist identity. I also contemplate the affiliations with words such as 'audience' in comparison with 'consumer' and 'art work' in comparison with 'product'. This is important, as in contemporary craft, the tension between these terms are present.

'Design' is a broad concept and has different meanings to people, depending on their background and knowledge. To me, it often has a commercial connotation to it, and therefore, in my mind it suits better to describe activities such as service design or graphic design. While in the broader context, craft falls within the design field, especially the word 'designer' has suffered a tremendous inflation due to its overuse. In this thesis I argue that the designers graduating from art schools, with a specific knowledge of certain materials, are indeed designers, makers, but above that entrepreneurs and end up structuring their working life similarly to fine artists. Thus, I am making a conscious decision to try to limit my use of the words 'design' or 'designer' in this thesis.

Contemporary craft

Contemporary craft is an appropriate term to be used when referring to my interest point within the larger craft and design context. It holds within it the notions of materiality, skills, and making, without feeling outdated. Contemporary craft embodies both the notion of uniqueness of objects, or a small series. Contemporary craft also embodies the notions of acquiring a specific skill that takes time. Similarly to, for example, media arts, the artists have to understand software and tools to be able to practice their art. As Ihatsu acknowledges in her paper, the term 'craft' by itself can have negative connotations in British English.¹⁴ The Finnish equivalent 'taidekäsityö' is more neutral. In Finnish however, the term handicraft or 'käsityö' is equally referring to hobbyists and professionals, making it more demanding to justify the positioning within fine arts. Therefore, a reference to the actuality of the craft, with the term 'contemporary' added in front, elevates the expression, and refers to an art form that is looking into the future. The addition of 'contemporary' also refers to the term 'contemporary art', of which shares similar territories and modes of working. Contemporary craft has a neutral enough tone to it. Some could argue that it is trendy, but nevertheless I found it best for this thesis. 'Contemporary design' refers to the futures of materials and design even more than contemporary craft. However, contemporary design is approaching more science than fine arts, therefore it is not used in this thesis.

¹⁴ Ihatsu, 184.

Contemporary Craft Mediation

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, mediation is “the process of influencing something and/or make it possible for it to happen”¹⁵ Mediation is therefore enabling, supporting, guiding and helping. It can also have more negative connotations. For example, the word mediator is defined to be someone in the middle of two disagreeing parties. In this thesis the mediators are professionals in the design field, whose goals are to create possibilities for makers and artists to make a living through their artwork.

In the context of contemporary craft, the concept of mediation incorporates the acts of knowledge sharing, curating, sharing networks, advising, selling, marketing, and providing venues, among others. The mediation work is also oriented into directions, as the mediator is quite literally in the middle of all the parties.

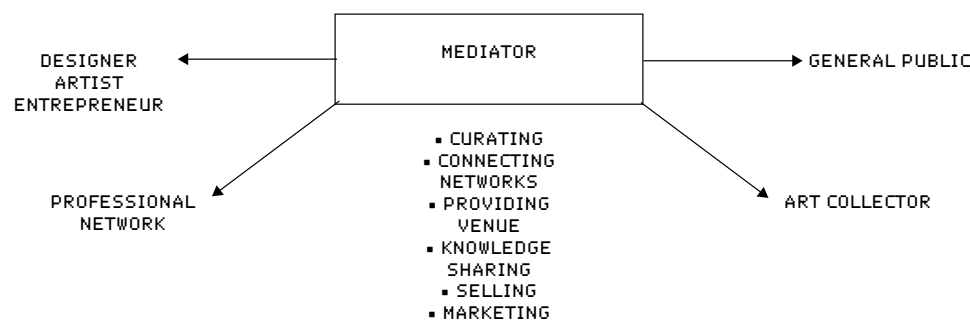


Fig. 5 The parties and directions of mediation.

Mediators are performing tasks, such as curating, connecting networks, providing venue, sharing knowledge, selling and marketing the artists and their work. The parties, mentioned in the figure above are all mediator's clients that mediators offer services to. All parties will benefit from mediation in different ways; artists by getting income, connections and networks. Professional networks and art collectors benefit by saving time, and by being able to make good investments. The general public benefits by getting a curated art experience.

¹⁵ “Definition of mediation noun”, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/mediation?q=mediation>

Artists, makers, designers

The creators are adamant to define their roles and titles based on their professional identity. As discussed with the mediators, in the current working culture for many it is difficult to determine their roles exactly.¹⁶ This is in the case of mediators, but also with the artists, makers, and designers. The roles change and skill sets are vast, and the moving between different roles should be done seamlessly. Perhaps there is some fear defining oneself could be limiting and close some doors for new opportunities.

Some makers define themselves through the material. As Kristina Riska, a well known contemporary craft artist, put it in *Helsingin Sanomat* for her anniversary article;

I am also a member of Finnish Sculpture Artists association, but I do not see myself as a sculptor. Why would I call myself one, as I am a ceramist and or a craft artist. It is not my job to define. I make sculptures out of clay (*HS*, 11.1.2020)¹⁷

Audience, spectator, user and consumer

The audience is also a client of the mediator. When a mediator uses his or her curatorial skills, they are serving the general public by creating an experience. Mediating in this context embodies dynamic interaction with the public, that can be educational or even critical. It is good to notice that the demographic for contemporary craft is most likely an informed citizen. Hannakaisa from UU Market mentioned that a part of her work is also making the spectator understand how the products are made and how the price of the item is formed.¹⁸ This type of mediation work creates value, but not necessarily one that can be measured in revenue immediately. It is easy to fall into thinking that a mediator is a sales person. To some extent they are. Also art can be consumed. However, I argue that the bigger task for medi-

¹⁶ Katja Hagelstam, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

¹⁷ “Keramiikkataiteilija Kristina Riskan töiden rajuutta selittää lapsena syntynyt elinikäinen kivulias vamma: ”En halua tehdä kaunista ja nättiä””, *Helsingin Sanomat*, Accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000006368509.html>

¹⁸ ”Olen myös Suomen Kuvanveistäjäliiton jäsen, mutten koe itseäni kuvanveistäjäksi. Minkä takia nimittäisin itseäni niin, koska olen keramiikkataiteilija tai taidekäsityöläinen. Ei ole minun tehtäväni määritellä. Minä rakennan teoksia savesta.”

Translated from Finnish by Kati Peltola.

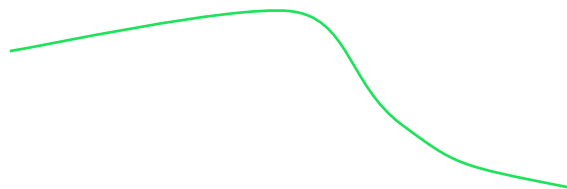
¹⁸ Hanna-Kaisa Pekkala, (CEO of UU Market) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

ators is to select pieces to represent, that have potential, a strong concept, innovation or insight of understanding the world, that will consequently be interesting also in terms of consumption.

Product and art work or *oeuvre*

The difference between 'art work' and 'product' could be simplified by saying that some are referring to goods that can be used, whereas others are to be viewed. The simplification, however, does not work when discussing contemporary craft, in which an artwork can have the language of an usable object. To continue with the notion of consuming art, some mediators are also selling a lifestyle by example. For instance, Lokal gallery's¹⁹ Katja Hangelstam is all about encouraging people to enhance their everyday life with objects that are handmade and have artistic qualities. They are products for consuming, but all at the same time they are art works to be enjoyed. Art works also include the notions of intuition and the idea that art is not necessarily about the final result, but about the journey towards it.

¹⁹ Lokal Gallery is a concept store in Helsinki. It is also one of the case studies of this thesis and will be discussed in depth later in this thesis.



3

Structure and Methodology

This thesis is based on data collected via professional literature, press and interviews with three case studies. It focuses on qualitative research methods, such as semi-standardized interviews, analysis of them and placing them into a larger context using sources in history, and national and professional press. Finally, I am analyzing the contemporary craft landscape and its mediators through the lense of currents in the field, such as feminist theory and Sitra's megatrends.

I am using literature review to determine the language and discuss historical perspective and their connections to the present. For this, I used the literature found on the topic written by Tiina Veräjänkorva and Anna-Marja Ihatsu. As my main data, I am using interviews conducted in January 2020. The interviewees are three expert organizations in the field, two of them focusing on contemporary craft and one of them focusing on young and emerging designers and artists.

The method of semi-standardized interviews is suitable for the kind of research that aims "to formulate such subject- and situation-related statements".²⁰ It allows us to get an insight of the day-day operations of mediators, but also understand the values and goals, hopes and wishes for the development of their organization. According to Uwe Flick, this method allows the researcher to create an interview, where questions are open-ended, and allows the interviewee to express themselves freely.²¹ The structure of the interview is formed to first start with these open questions, but encourages the interviewer also to ask more confrontational questions at the end of each section of the theme. I prepared for each interview by familiarizing myself with the case study organizations through secondary resources after which I developed a skeleton of relevant questions. These questions were adapted based on the operational systems of each organization and worked as a backbone for the conversation. To expand the understanding of the contemporary craft mediators in the field, I also interviewed two independent mediators in the field. The case study interviews were transcribed, and using the transcriptions the connecting themes were identified and compared to one another.

²⁰ Uwe flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. 3. ed.(London: Sage, 2006), 14.

²¹ Flick, 167.

In addition to literature reviews, I did active scanning of the current media and events for the duration of the thesis work to keep myself updated on the rapidly changing design scene. Through this scanning, I found out that there is a lot of conversation around the topic of art, craft, and design intersection and livelihood of makers without recognition that the link between them is contemporary craft mediation. I also attended professional events, such as *Making the Market* - seminar, in fall 2019, and used them also as part of my analysis on the contemporary craft field. The analysis is intertwined with showcasing the ecosystems of contemporary craft and the case studies in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

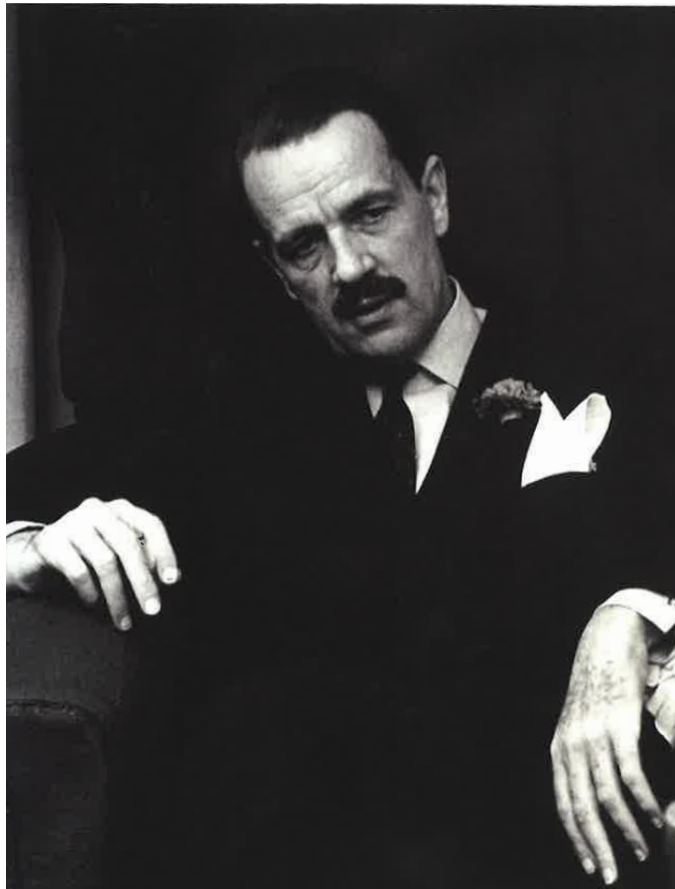


Fig 5. H. O. Gummerus portrait on the pages of American Vogue in 1961. From Aav, Marianne and Viljanen, Eeva. Herman Olof Gummerus – muotoilun diplomaatti, Helsinki: Design Museo, 2009.

4

Reflections on mediation in the contexts of time and place,
- yesterday, tomorrow, online, and abroad.

In this chapter, I place the concept of contemporary craft mediation in historical time contexts and discuss how it resonates with today. I will look into today's societal currents and how they mold the roles and attitudes of mediators. Lastly, I will reflect on the futures and trends, and speculate what they might mean for the mediating agents.

4.1 Herman Olof Gummerus - mediator who helped build the myth of Finnish Design

In order to understand the role of the mediator in contemporary Finnish design culture, it is productive to look at the design history of our nation. In it, we can find mediators, of whose actions have molded how the nation is viewed from the outside, serving as the greatest example is Herman Olof Gummerus. After placing him in the context of his time, I will reflect on what were the skills that made him a successful mediator and what we could learn from him as a mediator.

Finland is a young nation. Also, Finland is a design nation. One of the leading ideological projects has been the boosting of our patriotism and national identity in order to build up the nation. Designers and architects were included in this process at an early stage.²² In her doctoral thesis historian Kerstin Smeds has looked into the notions of national identity and its building with Finland as a case study.²³ In the article "A Paradise called Finland" she argues that one of the key elements of Finnish identity is reconstruction and nation building.²⁴ She bases this view on the constant battles that have been fought on Finnish soil, threat of foreign rule, and that way also our national identity. It seems that the conscious attempt to build a national image of a creative man living in harmony with nature was directed both towards the nation itself, but mostly towards the international audience. In many ways, the image has been built artificially and marketed in international conventions. It is interesting to think that this must have impacted the future generations of artists, designers, and architects. As often stereotypes are a very one-sided point of view, it must have formed

²² Kerstin Smeds, *A Paradise Called Finland*. (Scandinavian Journal of Design History no. 6, 1996), 63.

²³ "Kerstin Smeds," Umeå University, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://www.umu.se/en/staff/kerstin-smeds/>

²⁴ Smeds, 63.

to be a burden of expectations. A further question would be, how many designers did not fit into the canon of Finnish design and have therefore been dropped out of the history books, and how much have the mediators have played a role in these types of events occurring.

According to Smeds, the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1900 was the first culmination of this attempt to establish the Finnish nation apart from the Russian Empire, led by architects and designers. Smeds continues, that the exposition founded the ground for a national image of creative people living in harmony with nature.²⁵ This image lives on, to an extent, even to this day. Finland was depicted as mysterious and exotic, exhibiting a nation that is rural, yet able to portray themselves in a modern fashion through design.²⁶ Depicting Finland as a creative nation was used as a tool for *soft power*²⁷, to essentially put Finland on the map as an independent country. Smeds notes, that post-war the “designers and architects were needed more than ever before”²⁸ and due to shortage of materials, it demanded innovation and creative minds of designers and continues, that “the hunger for beauty was insatiable after deprivation”.²⁹ She argues that Finland was not the only country in the same situation, but in the case of Finland, hunger was fuelled by “grandiose and generous patriotic energy”.³⁰

The notion of Finland as a design nation has become a part of the national identity, but some signs of frustrations and identity crisis can be seen today within the design community. Young designers are tired of being compared to Aaltos and Wirkkalas, but paradoxically the underlying pride and patriotism raise their head when trying to gain credibility or, for example, funding from external sources. While the context of post-war Finland really needed beauty and goods, it is no longer the case. As a mediator today, it could be beneficial to deviate from referring to Finland as a design nation and to appreciate each designer and artist as an individual by attaching their aesthetics and message to larger global contexts than national pride.

It is good to remember that patriotism and nationalism in today's Finland have very different connotations, than in the beginning of the 20th century. It is understandable that patriotism during and after a war is a powerful

²⁵ Smeds, 66.

²⁶ Smeds, 67.

²⁷ Soft power = “a way of dealing with other countries that involves using economic and cultural influence to persuade them to do things, rather than military power”

“Definition of soft power noun”, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/soft-power>

²⁸ Smeds, 72.

²⁹ Smeds, 73.

³⁰ Smeds, 73.



Fig 7. Timo Sarpaneva, carpenter Adamo Brambilla and mediator Herman Olof Gummerus putting the exhibition up in Milan, 1954. Photographed by Jukka Pellinen, from Aav, Marianne and Viljanen, Eeva. *Herman Olof Gummerus – muotoilun diplomaatti*, Helsinki: Design Museo, 2009.

motivator for people's actions. So was the case of mediator Herman Olof Gummerus, who is known to be one of the central characters in building the national image. Gummerus, the “ambassador of Finnish design”³¹, was born in Finland to a diplomat family, but soon moved to Italy where he essentially spent his youth years. His years abroad allowed him to develop skills that furthered his assets within his mediator role for Finnish design; he spoke 6 languages and had cultural sensitivity needed to further designers' careers abroad. Swedish art critic Ulf Hård reminisces the character of Gummerus in *Sköna Hem* – magazine in 1981;

³¹ Pekka Korvenmaa. *Finnish Design: a Concise History*. (University of Art and Design, 2010), 167.

Gummerus, walked in Milan with a poppy flower in his buttonhole, a batistini handkerchief in his sleeve and a walking stick greeting everyone within the Scandinavian department, asking about the school life of their children and their wives' health. In the next moment he was already discussing with a Parisian colleague with fluent French or settling an exhibition to London with perfect English, blooming with synonyms.³²

Language is culture, and in a country where traveling was an activity of few and sparse, mediators who are sensitive to the culture, must have been worth gold. Gummerus became the interpreter of Finland.³³ His sensitivity went both ways; while Gummerus could understand the exotism in Finns with the eyes of a foreigner, As Smeds points out: "He is reputed to have said to the designers, keep quiet and be as exotic as possible."³⁴

Gummerus started his career in journalism as an international correspondent, much like many in his family.³⁵ While he never had a formal training in arts or commerce, Gummerus was interested in interiors and antiques. His path led him to become the Arabia porcelain factory's international correspondent. Initially, his position was a temporary substitution, but was eventually hired as the advertisement and PR manager for Arabia's porcelain factory and Nuutajärvi glass factory.³⁶ He was persistent and had a way with words. With his persuasive attitude and forward-thinking skills he managed to gather funding for the Milan IX triennale. He and Tapio Wirkkala managed to get Wärtsilä (owner of Arabia) to help with the funding.³⁷ After Iittala, Artek and Boman followed.³⁸ By now, they would have some funds, but not enough to cover all the costs. Woirhaye explains that it was then the time to ask for the state to support the Milan trip. They were denied and asked to turn back to industry for money, but Gummerus suggested that the state should match fifty Finnish pennies for every Finnish markka they received from the industry. According to Gummerus, the state representative laughed and said that he could promise that without knowing that they had already received some money from the industry. Wirkkala and Gummerus waited for a few days and returned telling that they had managed to gather one million Finnish markkas. Castrén had no choice but to keep

32 Helena Woirhaye, "Herman Olof Gummerus – kosmopoliitti patriootti," in *Herman Olof Gummerus: Muotoilun Diplomaatti*, ed. Marianne Aav and Eeva Viljanen (Helsinki: Designmuseo, 2009), 58.

33 Smeds, 74.

34 Smeds, 74.

35 Woirhaye, 30.

36 Woirhaye, 30.

37 Smeds, 74.

38 Woirhaye, 31.

his promise and funding was gathered.³⁹ All while his personal motivation was to travel to Italy, he managed to secure funding for the whole Finnish section in the triennale. This kind of boldness and interpersonal skills must have been an asset for his success as a mediator.

The triennale was a success; Wirkkala won the Grand Prix of exhibition architecture. Designers received several prizes, but their importance and meaning were amplified by Gummerus' words.⁴⁰ The legend says Gummerus had said that "if Finland would have been famous due to excellent sausages, I would have worked for that sausage."⁴¹ These remarks go to show that Gummerus was a devoted sales person. It is an important skill to have as a mediator, because in the end, it is a lot of convincing of others. It means being persuasive that craft is important and deserves respect and a platform to be exhibited and enjoyed. Smeds points out that "Gummerus followed this philosophy; if we first "present" a lovely Arabia service to the wife of the head of a big concern in Italy, let's say, and he finds it beautiful and tasteful, he'll remember that Finns also make good paper and buy it!"⁴² While this sounds a little naïve, it is not a far fetched selling tactic even in today's circumstances, or a marketing strategy, where for example social media influencers are gifted items in exchange for exposure on their platforms.

The importance of Gummerus as a mediator comes with his legacy; he lifted the self confidence of Finnish designers, and created the notions of "Scandinavian Design" or "Finnish Design" known to all.⁴³ While these concepts were new to most, it does not take away the importance of the designs themselves, argues Jukka Savolainen in Designmuseo's publication *Herman Olof Gummerus - muotoilun diplomaatti*, published in the context of an exhibition about Gummerus' lifework in 2009. He suggests that the designs become a part of a complex structure, where their initial meanings evolve, through which then their signification merges into a bigger picture.

⁴⁴ According to Smeds, "Select Finnish decorative art was thus used as a

39 Woirhaye, 31.

40 Woirhaye, 36.

"Suunnittelijat saivat lukuisia palkintoja, joiden määrään ja merkitykseen Gummerus taitavasti puhalsi lisää volyymiä."

41 Woirhaye, 59.

42 Smeds, 75.

43 Jukka Savolainen, "Herman Olof Gummerus – kosmopoliitti patriootti," in *Herman Olof Gummerus: Muotoilun Diplomaatti*, ed. Marianne Aav and Eeva Viljanen (Helsinki: Designmuseo, 2009), 90.

44 Savolainen, 90.



Fig 8. Gummerus presenting the ceramic work of Kyllikki Salmenhaara to the Minister of Culture of France André Malraux in Grand Palais, Paris in 1963. From Aav, Marianne and Viljanen, Eeva. Herman Olof Gummerus – muotoilun diplomaatti, Helsinki: Design Museo, 2009.

means of nation building in an economic sense.⁴⁵ Gummerus managed to pull together the industry, artists, and designers to work together for a greater good. An interesting question would be: how could we use similar tactics in today's society? Should, for example, Iittala and Arabia work more directly with the young designers? Perhaps it would require a bold personality to mediate and find a common ground for the industry that sometimes is too afraid of "failure".

4.2 Going abroad - the importance of the international gaze

The role of international exhibitions in mediating Finnish design has changed since Gummerus' times, but their meaning has not diminished, as pointed out by all of my case study interviewees. I was able to identify two reasons. Firstly, the notion of how small the Finnish market is led designers to look abroad. The purchasing power of Finns is recognized to be very small, mainly due to the small population. As Katariina Siltavuori, founder of Norsu Gallery and former director of Galerie Forsblom put it in the Making the Market seminar:

... The gallery (Norsu) was dedicated to Contemporary Nordic and Finnish craft, but for me, from the very beginning, the international part was very important because the Finnish market was so extremely small. I mean, I could count the collectors at the time with one hand.. Or less. ... Without the international art fairs I would never have sold Finnish contemporary craft and design to ... the National Museum in Scotland, to several other collections, and collectors.⁴⁶

According to the UU Market CEO, the Finnish art collectors tend to think about their purchasing decisions for a long time. While the value of the art work can be recognized, the decision seems to be thought of as an investment. What truly motivates the audience to make a purchasing decision might be more to do with the interest in supporting the maker and the culture of making as a whole.

The second common perspective that came about through the interviews was the notion of gaining local respect and credibility in Finland only after participating in trade shows abroad. As Krista Kosonen from Imu Design explained, it is important to acknowledge that without going straight abroad and building an exhibition in London in 2002, they would not be

⁴⁵ Smeds, 75.

⁴⁶ Katariina Siltavuori, "Are international fairs a crucial platform for galleries and artists?" (Round table conversation, Making the Market-seminar, Helsinki, October 21, 2019).

where they are now. The Finns will travel abroad to get good feedback and after will be taken much more seriously also in Finland.⁴⁷ Docent of art history and gender studies Harri Kalha notes the same: “It has been customary for us Finns to seek confirmation of the quality of our achievements from foreign evaluations...”⁴⁸ Perhaps it is the Finnish nature of being, a lack of self-confidence when the validation needs to be retrieved from the outside? In other words, international exhibitions are needed to sustain the field financially and potentially psychologically.

It is good to consider the necessity to physically move art pieces globally, especially from the perspective of sustainable development. It has two sides; on the other hand in contemporary craft, the pieces tend to be smaller as they are intended to stay in a domestic environment. It makes moving pieces around easier and environmentally friendly. Secondly, the importance of physically touching contemporary craft objects is imperative in some cases. Nevertheless, sometimes the access to international markets can also happen while staying put. For example, UU Market has been able to make international sales through online contact, where the client has seen an article in an acknowledged design magazine, *Dezeen*, for example.⁴⁹ It goes to show that there is a market that can be attained via online presence, but as Pekkala points out, requires efforts to develop. While physically moving art pieces around is not necessary, I think it is still important in the context of contemporary craft as it relies heavily on materiality and emotions that are evoked by the materiality.

4.2.1 Reflections on *Making the Market*, undertaking of Ornamo to advance the art and design export

Making the Market is a project of Ornamo, organized in conjunction with the Finnish Benelux, French and German institutes in 2019-2020. The goal of the project was to advance Finnish designers' and artists' opportunities in central Europe, by creating exposure and connections.⁵⁰ In October 2019, I attended a seminar organised in conjunction with the project in Helsinki, where the topics of the conversations addressed some of the hottest questions in the field; “From exhibitions to design diplomacy – the importance of design weeks”, “Are international fairs a crucial platform for galleries and

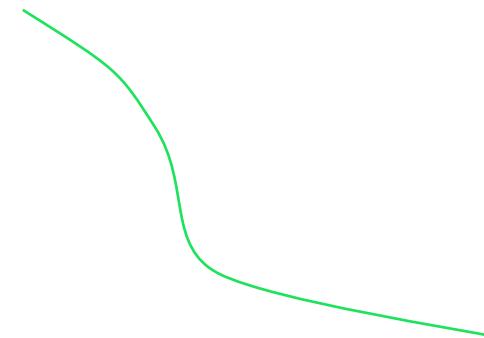
⁴⁷ Krista Kosonen, (Member of Imu Design) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

⁴⁸ Harri Kalha, *Myths and Mysteries of Finnish Design: Reading “Wirkkala” and the National Nature Paradigm*. (Scandinavian Journal of Design History no. 12,2002), 25.

⁴⁹ Hanna-Kaisa Pekkala, (CEO of UU Market) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

⁵⁰ “Making the Market Edistää Suomalaisen Taiteen Ja Muotoilu Vientiä.” Ornamo, Accessed July 7, 2020. <https://www.ornamo.fi/fi/projekti/making-the-market-tarjoo-taiteilijoille-ja-muotoilijoille-valineita-kansainvalistymiseen/?highlight=making+the+market>.

artists?” and “Why do we need new museums?”. The speakers were important actors in the design field of Helsinki, for instance Jukka Savolainen, the head of Design Museum, and curators Katarina Siltavuori and Katja Hagelstam, whom I have interviewed for this thesis as well. The cultural institutes on their part, had invited speakers from the cultural sectors of their respective countries. While the topics were very interesting, from a professional's point of view, the conversations did not have the time to develop into really revealing something completely new about the field. Interesting points of view in terms of mediation came from Katarina Siltavuori and Clélie Debehault, the founder of COLLECTIBLE design fair, as they pointed out, that sometimes it is good not to have the designer in presence, when exhibiting their work. In Siltavuori and Debehault's opinion, the skill sets of those designated to sell the art are vastly different from the designers. All in all, the importance of personal social connections came to the table several times. This in a way affirms some thoughts that I had already conceived; sometimes success in design comes down to interpersonal skills. It also affirms the importance of international fairs, and the opportunity to meet people. The mediator can be the help needed in these situations. When it comes to internationalization, the interpersonal skills are amplified, as it often also requires a sensitivity and knowledge of other cultures, as well as language skills.



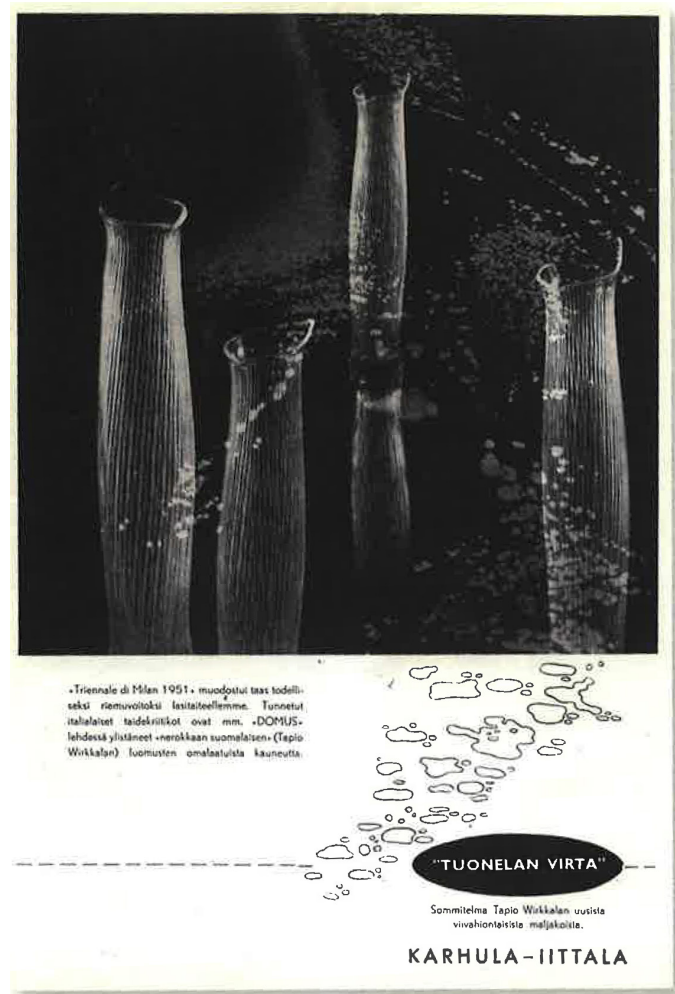


Fig 9. *Tuonelan virta* by Tapio Wirkkala advert in *Kaunis Koti* – magazine. The copy speaks highly of Finnish success in Milan's triennale. From Aav, Marianne and Viljanen, Eeva. Herman Olof Gummerus – muotoilun diplomaatti, Helsinki: Design Museo, 2009.

4.3 Photographs as mediators then and now - Online galleries

In this subchapter I am questioning the necessity of physically visiting to see contemporary craft objects. I am pondering if photography, moving image and technology as a whole could replace the experience of a gallery space.

Harri Kalha, docent of art history and gender studies, argues in his article “Myths and Mysteries of Finnish Design” that when looking into the representation of Finnish design abroad in the 1950’s, the importance of visual representation comes to play a significant role.⁵¹ He argues that objects themselves do not carry a majestic power, but in fact they are constructed, partly with photographs. The photographs are used as tools in creating heroic designers and their prestigious designs:

Photographs helped make cult objects out of the prize-winning pieces that were disappearing into foreign museums and private collections; the objects presented abroad were often prototypes or unique pieces that were hardly known by the Finnish public.⁵²

Contemporary craft differs from industrial design with the uniqueness of the designs. This of course limits the possibility for multiples existing in several places at once. If a unique piece is purchased by a museum or an art collector, the celebrity status of the object can be upkept with the images.

It is interesting to look at mediators working today through Kalha’s argument. Due to the emergence of social media, the visual representation in the form of photography is perhaps more important than ever. The whole online presence and brand is built based on the imagery of the objects. UU Market is a great example; they have created a platform that is heavily image based. If one wants to use the other four senses, one has to head to one of their events, because UU Market does not have a physical showroom, gallery, or a shop.⁵³ The quality of the image, and stories behind the object and maker become imperative and they aim to build credibility both within the design community and of course, within the general audience. If the photos are not good enough, the designers tend to steer away, as they want to associate their work with high quality standards. The audience, on the

⁵¹ Harri Kalha, *Myths and Mysteries of Finnish Design: Reading “Wirkkala” and the National Nature Paradigm*. (Scandinavian Journal of Design History no. 12,2002), 28.

⁵² Kalha, 28.

⁵³ This has changed during the thesis writing. UU Market will open a showroom in Töölö in August 2020.

other hand, wants to see familiar names in a clear and easily accessible way. In the interviews conducted for this thesis, the importance of the moving image and storytelling as marketing tools became evident. Mediators use storytelling as a tool to help build appealing brands. As discussed with Hannakaisa Pekkala, showing how things are made interests people, and in the long run can even increase the sales. Perhaps this curiosity is part of the culture of openness with the making process today. During times when access to information is very easy, YouTube for example fosters a culture of sharing knowledge and even very personal stories. Video can be used as a tool to show people how things are made, and therefore remind them that the objects are not made by a machine. In the best case, this makes the audience appreciate objects even more.

The year 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic have made us all change drastically how we consume places and objects. During the collective self-isolation, the question of the online presence of art and design has been brought to the table. Some think an online version of a museum can never replace the act of going to an art museum. As the megatrends⁵⁴ have pointed out, technology will be embedded into everything, but what does it mean to the white cube? Could we, in the future, view contemporary craft only on screens or as photographs? While one could think contemporary craft in its tactility is quite far opposed to technology, the artists and mediators should stay open to using technology at least as a tool. For example, the contemporary art gallery *Helsinki Contemporary* has offered a smartphone application that allows people to try the art pieces in their own home since 2016. This type of innovation could be potentially utilised by mediators, alongside the physical showrooms.

Another notion that the mediators could consider, is the necessity of traveling of art. It becomes a big question especially when thinking of contemporary craft. One of the differences between contemporary craft and contemporary art seems to lie in the importance of materiality and making by hand, and therefore senses such as touching, hearing, and smelling might be more important when judging contemporary craft works. While technology could potentially offer new ways of exhibiting, the general consensus seems to still be that the audience should be able to see the artwork, before making the potential purchasing decision.

⁵⁴ Megatrends are discussed in the next subchapter 2.4 of the thesis.

A further question could be: what does the white cube even mean for contemporary craft? For example, Lokal gallery has built many exhibitions that have a domestic feel to them, with a colorfully painted wall, or a ceiling. It suggests that the spectators are already asked to imagine the objects in their homes. It seems relevant especially with contemporary craft items that can be in use at home, or are produced in small series. Lokal doesn't have to bend to the modernist idea of a white cube, which is generally associated with contemporary art. The line is blurred seamlessly, and without making a statement, it quietly carries one; contemporary craft and art are equally appreciated at Lokal.

In his famous essay from 1976, Brian O'Dorethy explores the concept of a gallery space and argues that the whole modernist understanding of a gallery space is essentially a paradox of its own, that even our bodies visiting the gallery are an intrusion to the space, and the photograph is a metaphor of a gallery space;

The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space occupying bodies are not - or are tolerated only as kinesthetic mannequins for further study. This Cartesian paradox is reinforced by one of the icons of our visual culture: the installation shot, *sans* figures. Here at last the spectator, oneself, is eliminated. You are there without being there - one of the major services provided by its old antagonist, photography. The installation shot is a metaphor for the gallery space.⁵⁵

O'Dorethy is referring to a traditional fine art gallery, but his thoughts can be taken as a suggestion that maybe a white cube is not necessary, especially for contemporary craft. In the era of Instagram and other online platforms, we should consider these platforms as powerful tools to exhibit photographs, as our galleries.

The desire to put a contemporary craft piece in a white cube might stem from an urge to somehow "elevate" the "craft" to the same level as "art." However, this wish to differentiate art and craft is a social construction. As David Byles and Ted Orland argue in the book "Art and Fear - Observations on the Perils (and rewards) of Artmaking", is it really necessary?;

⁵⁵ Brian O'Dorethy and Thomas McEvelley, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 15.

The conventional wisdom here is that while “craft” can be taught, “art” remains a magical gift bestowed only by gods. Not so. In large measure becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your own voice, which makes your work distinctive.⁵⁶

To conclude this subchapter discussing the necessity of physically experiencing contemporary craft, I would argue that contemporary craft ought to be viewed physically due to its tactile nature. The photographs can then be used as a tool to “iconize” the objects, if necessary. Online gallery *Finnish Spirit* is doing this, quite successfully. They are exhibiting an array of Finnish makers and artists, compiling them into an aesthetically pleasing “wall” of art works without assessing the value or hierarchies of art and craft. When thinking of the traveling of art, we could start thinking about using technology for a completely different way of experiencing contemporary craft, not to replace the physical visits. On a more general note, art and craft could be viewed as equal and not assessed so much separately. The mediators can practice quiet activism of this by including and mixing traditional fine art pieces with contemporary craft pieces, thus to advocate the equal conception and value of craft and art.

4.4 Megatrends and their impact on contemporary craft culture

Fast developments in technology and societal issues such as the climate crisis also pose challenges for the art and design communities. Earlier this year, Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, published an updated version of their Megatrends future forecast report. The report provides an interesting opportunity to speculate how changes in our society will affect the mediator’s work and the art and design communities at large. In the context of this thesis, Sitra’s megatrends will be evaluated within the conditions of Helsinki and its contemporary craft community, including its mediators. Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, is an independent fund and a think tank, aiming at a fair and sustainable future.⁵⁷ Now, it is important to note that in this thesis, the megatrends are used as a tool to speculate. Also, the perspective is solely from the authors;; it is Western and not shared universally. I am judging the megatrends through the gaze of my thesis context, Helsinki, and contemporary craft, and what it means not only for a mediator but also for the ‘design bubble’ itself.

⁵⁶ David Bayles and Ted Orland, *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, (Santa Cruz (Calif): The Image Continuum Press, 2002), 3.

⁵⁷ “About Sitra.” Sitra. The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, accessed July 8, 2020. <https://www.sitra.fi/en/themes/about-sitra/>.

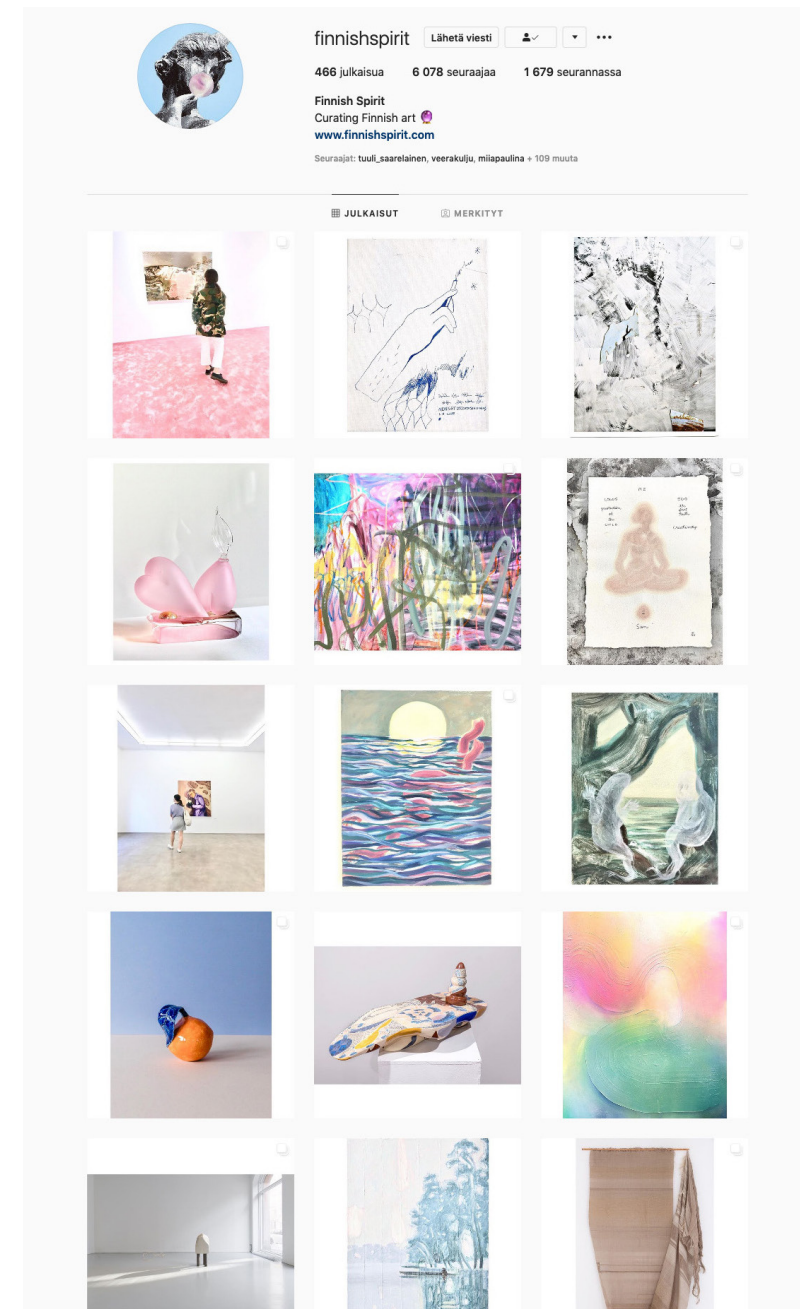


Fig 10. Finnish Spirit is an online gallery, actively curating a “wall” of contemporary Finnish art. From <https://www.instagram.com/finnishspirit/?hl=fi>.

Sitra's overlook on the megatrends that influence our future have been divided into five main factors. While the analysis has been divided into themes it is important to note that there are other meta trends and underlying tensions and connections with and within each other, equally important when reflecting on the trends.⁵⁸ The most prominent factor is the urgent need for ecological reconstruction and action to slow down climate change. Secondly, the strengthening of relational power is a trend, meaning that we should move away from the multipolar world understanding, and understand that power is connected also to companies, regions, and other transnational organizations. Thirdly, the evident ageing of the population in the occidental world and diversification of the population caused by globalization and for example environmental migrants also have an underlying effect on global trends. The fourth trend has to do with rethinking the economy, the introduction to a circular economy, and finally how technology is embedded in everything.⁵⁹

When reflecting on the contemporary craft in light of climate change, one could argue that the purpose it has is no longer to produce objects we need, but to give pleasure and meaningfulness to life, as art should. The truth is, we do not need any more objects, as all we need has already been produced. In my opinion, it is more important for the mediators to support designers who are environmentally aware, but at the same time, environmental consciousness should be embedded in every artist by now. By being environmentally aware, I am referring to designers who are thinking about the whole lifecycle of their product, from the conceiving to possible death of their objects. Can the raw materials be recycled? What kind of an impact does the production have for the environment? Ideally, and some would argue naïvely, designers and artists should practice cradle-to-cradle thinking, which means adopting "nature's system of nutrient flow and metabolism, in which the very concept of waste doesn't exist."⁶⁰

In the end, the mediator's role is to value, cherish and share the art, and that way encourage sustainable ways of living and being. For example, mediators can lead by example, by promoting a lifestyle that is more slow-paced, valuing community over the individual, and focused on experience-based consumption. The mediators' message is already buy less, buy local, and love the object more. This way mediators can be part of changing the general atmosphere of attitudes. For instance, one of Lokal's values is

⁵⁸ Mikko Dufva, *Sitran selvityksiä 162, Megatrendit 2020*. (Helsinki:Sitra, 2020), 5.

⁵⁹ Dufva, 5.

⁶⁰ William McDonough and Michael Braungart. *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 104.



Fig 11. Contemporary craft in an outdoor exhibition "O Worm Supreme" in Joutsa. *Beat-pollinators' nest residence* by Aura Latva-Somppi, Blacksmoked ceramics, with milk coating, 2020. Photo courtesy of Tuo Tuo Kulttuuri Tila, from <https://www.tuotuoarts.com/news>

that they want to support goods that are made close to their shop. Only a few of their hundreds of merchandise sold are produced in Estonia, the rest locally.⁶¹ It is not completely paradox-free, as in the end, even the mediator is part of our capitalist system and still needs to make ends meet, and therefore encourages consumption.

As Sitra's Megatrend Report suggests, in the light of the climate crisis, our economic systems are forced to be re-evaluated.⁶² One of the manifestations of this re-evaluation is suggested to be reinforcing the importance of circular economy. From the artist's point of view, it means designing without waste materials, and perhaps using materials that can be cycled back into the system without losing their value. Also, from a mediator's point of view, it might mean new ways of operating; borrowing, leasing, fixing, and recycling should also be thought of as part of the business models of the future. As an example, Lokal is collaborating with restaurant Nolla, where they have curated an array of artworks for the restaurant, which clients can then buy if they find them interesting.⁶³ In a way, this is an extension of their exhibition space and everyone benefits. The artists' work gets exposure, the restaurant does not have to make a huge investment for art, and the general audience gets to have a carefully curated experience of new contemporary craft.

Sitra's report encourages looking into the distribution of power and what kind of consequences it might have. Leaders who are able to shout loud and clear, seem to get their voices heard. In the ever fast-paced world the trust in democracy is tested, as it can be judged to make changes too slowly.⁶⁴ The trust is tested when individuals find it harder to comb through the information overload, especially when it is more demanding to assess the truthfulness of the information. Simple messages end up getting through to people. This confusion is used as a technique in politics and might lead to idolizing authoritarian leaders.⁶⁵ All in all, perhaps the notion of a world that is getting more complicated pushes people to return back to a culture of simplicity. An overall change of certain attitudes will be emphasized, such as within social interaction, living naturally to respect the boundaries of nature, seeing humankind as part of nature, and finding progress beyond material values.⁶⁶ I would argue that these trends will work for the benefit of the contemporary craft scene as a whole. These are the values that the mediators could emphasize with their work, by choosing to work with men-

tally conscientious artists, and to make an effort to emphasize that instead of consuming goods, the artefacts should be valued more for their artistic expression, appreciated for their beauty, and used in special moments in life.

One of the roles of art is to make an impact on the attitudes and thinking of the audience. It can be used for the benefit of sustainable development by alarming the audience, or provoking a conversation. Of course it is not entirely problem-free, and one could argue that the disguise or title of "art" gives an excuse to use harmful materials "for the sake of art". However, the mediators can work as trendsetters and in the long haul should be recognised as actors to influence the slow changing of mindsets. For the mediator, there are complications brought up when wanting to take into consideration the contradiction of capitalism and social ideals. How do you justify wanting to sell more, when it is not really needed? A more complicated issue is how to help change societal structures and conventions. This would require a lot of innovative and creative business thinking to completely strip the current systems and think outside the box. This could include unconventional exhibiting spaces, rethinking lending of art, and for example online exhibiting. All of my case study organizations are doing some form of these examples and they will be discussed later in this thesis.

To sum up this chapter, I have formed a collection of topics to discuss, which stem from looking into one of the most significant Finnish mediators, Herman Olof Gummerus. Gummerus was a product of his time and the relevance of his methods are somewhat outdated. He however, paved the way for Finnish crafts in the world market. The superstardom was built partly by using photographs which led me to think about the importance of photographs to mediators and as mediators. What do they present and lastly, could photographs, or specifically online photos replace the white cube? Lastly, when I start imagining futures, I use the megatrends as a tool to speculate. Mediators are responsible to respond to the needs of our time. They possess a level of power that should be used to benefit the ecological reconstruction.

⁶¹ Katja Hagelstam, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

⁶² Dufva, 46.

⁶³ Katja Hagelstam, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

⁶⁴ Dufva, 30.

⁶⁵ Dufva, 30.

⁶⁶ Dufva, 33.

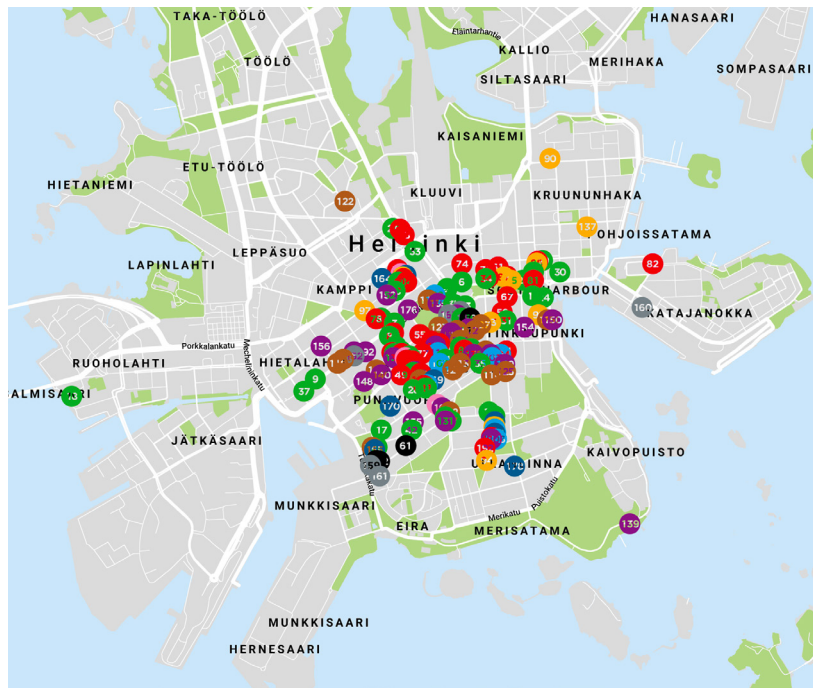


Fig 12. A cropped shot of the Design District of Helsinki, and the literal mapping of some of the mediators in Helsinki. From <https://designdistrict.fi/fi/kartta/?filter=all>

5

Backdrop and culture of mediation - Mapping mediators in Helsinki

In this chapter, I will map the agents of design mediation in Helsinki by introducing the most visible parties supporting contemporary craft artists and designers in the profit and non-profit sectors. It is my attempt to understand the fabric of mediating agents and their connections in Helsinki, which are multifaceted. Therefore, I have chosen examples that do not always fulfill the same parameters and try to form a satisfying overview of agents.

Finland has a small but fairly vibrant design scene, that is centered in Helsinki. This thesis has been framed to focus on the capital area of Finland because most of the companies and design events are taking place there. However, it is important to recognize that there are other creative hubs in Finland. For example, Lahti has creative energy, due to the Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Art. Although now based in Helsinki, the case study of this thesis UU Market is initially a project of Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Art alumni. The University of Lapland with its Faculty of Art and Design in Rovaniemi creates a concentration of creatives in the north of Finland. Also Turku has its own design and contemporary craft scene, with active organizations such as *Uuden Muotoilun Yhdistys ry*, which aims to create events and gain more exposure to design.⁶⁷

Mediation takes different forms, some happening physically in the form of exhibitions and some taking place in online platforms. One could argue that traditional media is also a platform for mediation work, however these platforms won't be discussed in depth in this thesis. With traditional media I am referring to television, print magazines and newspapers. Again, it is good to recognize the value of media as a mediation tool, and especially what they used to represent. Print media might be on the verge of death in its physical form, but for example the Habitare furniture fair was based on the idea of Sauli Sipilä, the former editor-in-chief of Avotakka, a reputed design magazine published since 1967.⁶⁸ It goes to show that media, as even the words etymology entails, has been the "middle" in the masses and the artists and designers, and even intertwined in the professional networks.

⁶⁷ "Uuden Muotoilun yhdistys", Uuden muotoilun yhdistys, accessed August 11, <https://uudenmuotoilunyhdistys.fi/>

⁶⁸ "Habitare 50 vuotta – mutta mistä kaikki alkoikaan?", Habitare, accessed September 12, <https://habitare.messukeskus.com/mista-kaikki-alkoikaan-habitaren-tarina/>

5.1 Organizational spectrum of contemporary craft spaces

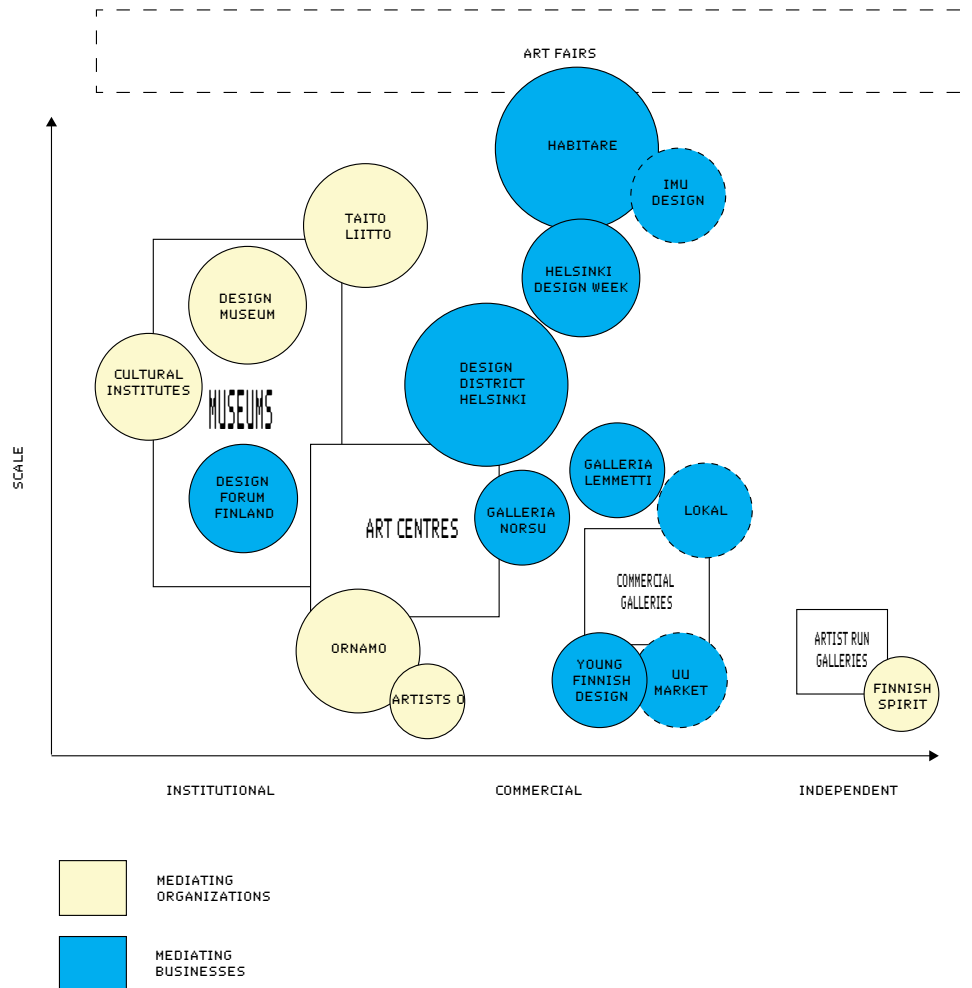


Fig. 13 Organizational spectrum of contemporary art spaces, adapted from Kia Evon's diagram.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Kia Evon, *Thinking Outside the White Cube – Polemic Study of Contemporary Art Space*; *Valkoisen Kuution Polemiikki – Turkimus Nykytaiteen Tiloista*. (Master's thesis, Aalto University, 2017), 21, fig 13.

To investigate the complete spectrum of art spaces, and to make sure I look at the mediators in all of the scales, I have used as an aid the illustration of Kia Evon from her Master's thesis. (see fig. 13) She focuses on the typologies of contemporary art spaces, but I found it covers also the contemporary craft spectrum. I have used her base, however reoriented it towards the contemporary craft spectrum that does have a wider, often commercial, context outside the white cube. The strength of Evon's diagram lies in its simplicity, but also the ability to recognize the scale and the three scopes of the field; the institutional, commercial, and independent sectors. I have then divided the mediators into non-profit organizations (yellow) and for profit organizations (blue).

5.2 The active parties and direction of mediation

There are many institutional as well as private businesses in Helsinki who are performing some level of mediation work, although it might not be the sole purpose of these organizations. The direction of their mediation efforts moves between several agents. For example, big associations such as Ornamo and Taitoliitto do play a key role in contemporary craft mediation, through organizing sales events as well as offering support to the artists and makers. This means that the direction of their support is not only on the mediating between the general public and the artists and designers, but also between the professional network and the makers. The support for designers and artists comes also in forms of education and training.

I have briefly discussed for-profit organizations who also do mediating work. In this division, my case studies fall into this category. Most for-profit organizations mainly focus on connecting the artists and the general public, the difference between these organizations and my case studies lie in the focal point of the goods promoted. I choose to focus on contemporary craft mediators but will present other mediators, focused on furniture. As an example, *Young Finnish Design*, a company that aims for profit making with mediation work between furniture designers and production companies.

A second difference lies in the amplitude of the organization and their operations. For example, Helsinki Design Week is recognized as a mediator between the general public and the makers, but it is a much bigger scale mediator and reaches a much wider audience. Their audience is the general public as a whole, whereas in my case studies, they serve the general public, but wish to reach the contemporary craft collectors and in Imu design's case, also the potential industry producers.

5.3 Non-Profit Organizations mediating contemporary craft

In this section it is my attempt to recognize non-profit mediators of contemporary craft, and to present more in depth those who are the most actively mediating. As seen in the figure 13, I have created a visual map to help understand the participants discussed. Firstly I discuss Design Museum and Design Forum Finland. Secondly, Ornamo and Taitoliitto. Lastly, the Design District Helsinki.

In my visual map, I have added Design Museum and Design Forum Finland within the mediating organizations. The Museum's primary function is to preserve Finnish design history and educate the public. Design Forum Finland, again, is a non-profit organization, maintained by the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design, an association established in 1875.⁷⁰ The relevance to mention them as part of the contemporary craft landscape lies in their history and the design prizes they grant each year. Interestingly, Herman Olof Gummerus, became the CEO of the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design in 1951 and also is an example of the role the society plays, in organizing events promoting Finnish know-how. Design Forum Finland today is focused more on the "growth of Finnish companies and organizations, and their international competitiveness and success" by using design competence on a strategic level.⁷¹ However, their juried awards, such as the Young Designer of the Year, is an example of mediation work, supporting the interest point of this thesis. The website of Design Forum Finland states; "The purpose of the prize is to encourage young designers to carry on uncompromising and original work in design." which offers a great opportunity for contemporary craft artists to get exposure. The prize comprises of a 5000 euro prize and a solo exhibition for the young designer or artist.

Ornamo and Artists O

Ornamo (or at the time Suomen Koristetaiteilijain Liitto Ornamo) was founded in 1911 to promote and guard the interests of decorative artists.⁷² It is a professional association for interior and industrial designers, furniture designers, textile and fashion designers, package designers, service designers, digital designers as well as contemporary craftspeople and artists. Ornamo has about 2700 members across the country, out of which about

⁷⁰ "About Us", Design Forum Finland, accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.designforum.fi/en/about-us/>

⁷¹ "About Us", Design Forum Finland, accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.designforum.fi/en/about-us/>

⁷² Paula Hohti, *Rajaton muotoilu: Näkökulmia suomalaiseen taideteollisuuteen*. (Helsinki: Avain/BTJ Finland Oy, 2011), 73.

three fourths work as designers, and one fourth as artists.⁷³ To become a member, one needs to have a higher degree in design. While the main goal of the association is the promotion of interests of its members, Ornamo has various projects that are intended to help the design professionals in their careers.

Ornamo offers support for their members in forms of training, legal advice, and promotion. Ornamo's most tangible form of mediation is the annual Art and Design Sales (Teosmyynti). As stated on their website "The Ornamo Art and Design Sale brings hundreds of artworks to Puristamo at Helsinki Cable Factory. These include unique design objects, miniature sculptures, jewelry as well as ceramic, metal, glass and textile art by well-known and rising Finnish designers and artists." During the interview with designer Tero Kuitunen, he acknowledged the importance of this sale. He has sold pieces through the event, and continues that members of The Finnish State Art commission⁷⁴ are regular visitors and have acquired pieces through the Ornamo Art and Design sales. Some might consider the Ornamo sale also as a competitor to smaller mediators within Helsinki.

Artists O (Taiteilijat O ry) is a society for professional artists working in the field of applied art.⁷⁵ It was founded in 2006 and it operates under Ornamo. They are following the steps of their precedent, the former TAIKO ry. While Ornamo presents itself as a representative for all design fields, Artists O is focused on contemporary craft and reinforcing the bridge between craft art and fine arts. As member, one can take part in exhibitions focusing on contemporary craft.

Finnish Crafts Organization Taito (Taitoliitto/Käsi- ja taideteollisuusliitto Taito ry)

In short, "the Finnish Crafts Organization Taito" takes care of the group's common affairs, engages in developing the sector and tends to communications and domestic and international connections."⁷⁶ Taitoliitto supports local handicraft and craft activities, with the purpose of fostering handicraft culture as private trade.⁷⁷ Their functions are very inclusive - they

⁷³ Pekka Lith, *Muotoilualan työmarkkinat 2019. Raportti muotoilualan työelämän kysymyksistä tilastoaineistojen valossa*. (Ornamo, 2019), 4.

⁷⁴ "Who are we", State Art Commission, accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.valtion-taideteostoimikunta.fi/en/whoware/>

⁷⁵ "Artists O – a society of artists", Artists O, accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.artists-o.fi/en/artists-o>

⁷⁶ "Finnish Crafts Organization Taito", Taitoliitto, accessed February 20, 2020, https://www.taito.fi/en/finnish_crafts_organization/

⁷⁷ Pekka Lith, *Käsityöalan subdanne- ja toimialaraportti 2019. Raportti käsityöalan yrityksistä, yritysprofiilista, markkinoista kasvuyrittäjyydestä ja läbiajan subdanneodotuksista*. (Käsi- ja taideteollisuusliitto Taito ry, 2019), 2.

encourage handicraft culture for all ages, and backgrounds and support the handicraft entrepreneurs. A great example of their mediation efforts is the Taito *yrittyslaboratorio*-project, (entrepreneur laboratory) where they offer a free stand at the Finnish Craft and Design fair in Tampere. The project is conducted in collaboration with Suomen Yrittäjät, which is an interest and service organization for small and medium-sized enterprises.⁷⁸ Taitoliitto will curate a selection of artisans and designers who have an interest in starting a business, or have a new interesting idea that would need testing in a fair environment and context.

Design District Helsinki

Design district Helsinki is “a cluster of creative businesses and it’s a neighborhood association that offers residents and visitors shopping, dining, accommodation, and experiences and comprises over 200 members.”⁷⁹ Surprisingly, the Design District Helsinki is actually not a for profit organization, but an association that the businesses can apply to become a member of. The activity is funded with membership fees which is then directed to the most important marketing tool for the design district; the distributable map.⁸⁰

In practice, Design District Helsinki offers a map outlining design locations and a schedule for events in the participating businesses around central Helsinki. The map is targeted for visitors interested in design, but gives a nice summary of places to visit for a local, too. The focus is on shopping local design, with a goal of “boosting Helsinki’s reputation as a city of design.”⁸¹ The functions are relying on collaboration with the local businesses. For instance, Design District Helsinki offers guided “design walk” tours in collaboration with Happy Guide Helsinki. The structure of the organization seems to be quite light, and easy functioning and therefore seems to stand the test of time too. Providing a map, funded through memberships is a great way for visualising the amount of design businesses in Helsinki, but does not require constant updating. Also providing tours is another great tool for bringing the art viewer and maker together. Because the contemporary craft field is so fragmented and scattered, this is definitely something all mediators could spend some more time doing. By bringing

78 “About Suomen Yrittäjät”, Suomen Yrittäjät, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.yrittajat.fi/en/about-suomen-yrittajat-526258>

79 “About”, Design District Helsinki, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://designdistrict.fi/en/about/>

80 Anniina Dunder-Berg, (Executive director of Design District Helsinki - Designkortteliry) E-mail message to the author, June 2020.

81 “About”, Design District Helsinki, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://designdistrict.fi/en/about/>

the makers and the general public closer to each other, the mediators could reveal what happens behind the scenes. These kinds of activities could bring the community closer together, lift it as a whole, and open opportunities for collaboration.

Design Museum and Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes Abroad

It is worthwhile mentioning bigger state funded institutions such as the Design Museum in Helsinki and the several cultural institutes operating in the biggest European cities. A majority of their budget is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Design Museum “researches, collects, documents and exhibits Finnish and international culture of design”.⁸² Cultural institutes “advance international mobility, visibility and collaboration of Finnish professionals in the arts, culture and research.”⁸³ From a young contemporary craft artist’s point of view, both of these platforms offer an opportunity for collaboration and exposure. For example, *Institut Finlandais* in Paris has collaborated with the UU market, with an exhibition in the institute’s premises in spring 2020. Unfortunately due to COVID-19, the exhibition was turned into an online exhibition, but goes to show that this kind of collaboration is happening, where organizations like UU Market will curate the exhibition and Institut Finlandais can offer the space. The Design Museum is also from time to time presenting young contemporary craft artists. While both of the institutions are quite heavy structures, they are still willing to collaborate with young makers. For example, the exhibition *Emoveo* was organized in collaboration with independent Aalto students and Design Museum in 2018, in the backyard of the Design and Architecture Museums. In the institutions like the museum or a cultural institute, the programme’s are often done well in advance, but the *Emoveo* project was realized within the same calendar year, with relative ease. It shows openness in attitudes, but requires the students to take the initiative and also charge of the labor. In other words, these institutes work as a mediator offering a platform for young contemporary craft artists, are somewhat open to student initiatives, but are not solely focusing on contemporary craft artists.

82 Tuomas Auvinen, Mirkku Kullberg and Ulla Teräs, *Kansainvälistä huipputasoa edustava Arkkitehtuuri- ja designmuseum Helsinkiin; Selvitys toteuttamisen edellytyksistä ja tarvittavista toimenpiteistä*. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2018:29, 2018), 15.

83 “About Us”, The Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes, accessed September 13, 2020. <https://instituutit.fi/en/info/>

To sum up the non-profit organizations as contemporary craft mediators, I argue that they do play a mediator role, but since none of them are solely focused on contemporary craft, the young artists might not always be taken into consideration. It requires students and young designers' own initiatives to be recognized by these large institutions. Even Ornamo might be too big of an organization to support contemporary craft mediators. While they do organize events, advertise competitions, and give business advice for their members, they do not work with mediating businesses like Lokal or UU Market. Perhaps recognition from Ornamo, in form of monetary support for these small scale mediators would work in the benefit of contemporary craft artists, and also the members of Ornamo.

5.4 For-Profit Organizations mediating Contemporary Craft

Compared to the previous mediator examples which are public, nationwide or state-funded organizations, the business oriented mediators seem to have much stronger emphasis on the international public. Just the name choices of each business, which are all in English, suggests their clients are cosmopolitan, if not international. In this subchapter, I will be presenting for-profit mediators, such as Luovi Productions Oy, Young Finnish Design and a few contemporary craft-oriented galleries.

Helsinki Design Week, Luovi Productions Oy

The very first Helsinki Design Week was organized in 2005. It consisted of the now renowned Design Market and Open Studios events, which are still part of the annual festival.⁸⁴ Both of the events can be recognized as forms of mediation, working as liaisons between the art viewers and makers. Design Market brings together about 200 vendors offering them a chance to directly interact and see clients. The Open Studios event encourages creative workspaces, such as design and architecture studios, to open their doors to the public.

Helsinki Design Week is an event produced by Luovi Productions Oy, which is a for-profit organization. In their fifteen years Luovi Productions has managed to create an event that flourishes in the cultural scene of Helsinki

⁸⁴ "Historia", Helsinki Design Week, accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.helsinkidesign-week.com/fi/meista/aiemmat-festivaalit/>

and is open for everyone. By now, the Helsinki Design Week has managed to build a reliable brand, under which designers and makers feel like they want to be part of. This is crucial to their functions as they offer a platform for designers to create their own events under the umbrella of Helsinki Design Week by outsourcing the production of these events to the designers, they are able to offer a wide range of events.

The concept of a design week is a global phenomenon, advertising the city as a design city, creating a fruitful atmosphere for design related activities. Design weeks are often organized by a for-profit organization with the support of institutions, cities and enterprises. The design week is often traditionally organised around a furniture fair, as is in the case in Helsinki, Paris, and Milan. Accelerators and key agents can also be for example design and art magazines. After, quite organically, some events start to take place around the event, creating complex structures, where the organizers can work quite invisibly for the greater good of all design related activities. Namkyu Chun, a researcher from Aalto University used the concept of "place-making" when analyzing a new, small scale fashion event in Helsinki and its effect on the industry as a whole.⁸⁵ He argues that place-making is a collective effort creating a fruitful soil for local players to advance their economic growth and even further the symbolic international recognition. While Chun is basing his research on small scale events in the fashion field in Helsinki, these same notions can be recognized in the design week activities. Design weeks are indeed opportunities for cities to establish themselves on the map and their benefit for young artists could be measured in terms of international exposure.

Young Finnish Design

Young Finnish Design is a company that aims to help new designers to get their products into manufacturing and markets. "We aim to connect designers, manufacturers and sales channels." states the founder, designer Elisa Luoto.⁸⁶ Run by two Aalto University design student alumni, Young Finnish Design was founded in 2017⁸⁷ fuelled by a collective experience of lack of opportunities to connect manufacturers and recent graduates and new makers. Their main focus is on furniture, lighting and interior design products. Their service is based on offering packages to students through which they will find a manufacturer for their designs. The focus is mostly on industrial

⁸⁵ Namkyu Chun and Olga Gurova. "Place-Making the Local to Reach the Global," *Fashion Practice* 11 (2018): 26-52.

⁸⁶ Young Finnish Design, "From Designers to Designers." *Instagram*. February 2, 2020. Accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8OgrfWoi7L/>

⁸⁷ Heidi Huovinen, *Suomalaisen Muotoilun Vierivä Kivi Ei Sammaloidu - Suomalaisen Muotoilun Kobaamia Haasteita Muotoilijan Näkökulmasta*. (Master's thesis, Aalto University, 2019), 10.

ways of making and therefore they do not necessarily serve the contemporary craft artists, whose work is often done by hand and in small series, thus Young Finnish Design is not included in the case studies. Nevertheless, the importance of their work needs to be recognised as they share similar values and motivations as the cases studied in this thesis. Clearly, they have also seen the need for their service and are enthusiastically making an effort in connecting the industry and new talents.

Design oriented galleries: Galleria Lemmetti and Galerie Forsblom

Just in a few words, I want to mention private galleries with a design or contemporary craft presence. They are not necessarily actively mediating, but do offer an arena for contemporary craft and design. Galleria Lemmetti specializes in the best of contemporary and modern Finnish design.⁸⁸ It is a project of Juhani Lemmetti, a design and art collector focusing his personal collection on designers with a longer career, such as, Yrjö Kukkapuro, Alvar Aalto, and Rut Bryk. His collection is also mainly focusing on furniture design. His gallery is open only by appointment, but often lends his pieces to exhibitions.⁸⁹ He has also provided his space for Aalto University's student exhibition, Pro Arte Utili in 2017, focusing on furniture design. Juhani Lemmetti could perhaps be recognized more as a collector rather than a mediator. Galerie Forsblom also represents more established contemporary craft artists, such as Kim Simonsson.⁹⁰ They have also had exhibitions of Oiva Toikka, Harri Koskinen, and Kristina Riska.⁹¹ All of them are reputed artists in the contemporary craft field with years of experience and international recognition. The private galleries' activities happen very much behind the scenes, and the direct benefit for not so well-known artists is minimal.

5.5 Independent mediators and curators

The contemporary craft field has a lot of interesting individual players who move within the field without docking into any singular organization. It would be impossible to gather all the independent mediators in this thesis, so I have chosen to discuss with two of them, as they are actively participating in the current conversation. I discussed with two of these agents about their thoughts on the field and the mediation work. Tero Kuitunen

⁸⁸ "About Lemmetti", Galleria Lemmetti, accessed July 15, 2020. <http://lemmetti.fi/about-lemmetti/>

⁸⁹ "Juhani Lemmetti: Sytyn designesineistä, joissa yhdistyvät estetiikka ja funktio", Design Museum, accessed July 15, 2020.

⁹⁰ "Artists represented", Galerie Forsblom, accessed July 15, 2020. <http://www.galerieforsblom.com/artists/c/artists-represented-en>

⁹¹ "Artists exhibited", Galerie Forsblom, accessed July 15, 2020. <http://www.galerieforsblom.com/artists/c/artists-exhibited-en>

is a practising designer who enjoys organizing exhibitions and has been involved in several different kinds of projects. Katarina Siltavuori on the other hand, is an independent curator in the contemporary craft field and represents the gallery world, by being a professional art critic and art historian, whose focal point throughout her career has been contemporary art and craft.

Tero Kuitunen is a designer maker and a curator. He is a maker with an interest in many different areas of design - spatial, exhibition and object making. Kuitunen has been invited to curate exhibitions, for example the *Wild at Heart* exhibition, "an international exhibition project initiated by the Finnish Institute in Germany, in collaboration with the Finnish Institutes in Hungary, Sweden, and Japan. It premiered at Vienna Design Week in 2019 and has since been shown in Budapest and Stockholm."⁹² Kuitunen is an example of the nature of today's young designers; individuals with a vast skill and interest set not settling in one material. In a way, his work resonates with history too; it is not uncommon to choose a designer to work as a commissioner for exhibitions. Finland and its design are put on a pedestal and presented to the world with Kuitunen's view of what design in Finland is today, similarly to Wirkkala and Aalto in the 1940's and 1950's.⁹³

When discussing the curating philosophy of Kuitunen, he notes that it is a different point of view when a designer puts together an exhibition and when it is, for example, an art historian curating an exhibition. Exhibitions, built with a designer in the lead are often highly visually coherent while addressing functional aspects of the exhibition. For example in the *Wild at Heart* exhibition, it was crucial that the exhibition was curated and designed in a way that it was easy to move around.⁹⁴ To understand all the parameters for it to be possible, a design background must have been one of the reasons Kuitunen was invited to do the curating. Kuitunen also has the connections within the design scene, and therefore can reach a range

⁹² "Wild at Heart - A Collection of Modern Finnish Design and Art", Helsinki Design Week, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.helsinkidesignweek.com/events/wild-at-heart-a-collection-of-modern-finnish-design-and-art/>

⁹³ Pekka Korvenmaa. *Finnish Design: a Concise History*. (University of Art and Design, 2010), 166.

⁹⁴ Tero Kuitunen, "From exhibitions to design diplomacy - the importance of design weeks?" (Round table conversation, Making the Market-seminar, Helsinki, October 21, 2019).

of people. Of course, it is good to reflect, if the range of exhibited work is wide enough. Kuitunen said it was important for him to have people from different age groups within Wild at Heart. Kuitunen is curating from the inside of the design bubble, but an art historian, for instance, would gaze at the works from a different angle. The benefit of having a vast knowledge of art history allows design and contemporary craft to be placed within a wider context of art and society. The appreciation of design and craft on an academic level benefits all, as it recognizes that design and contemporary craft artists have things to say and are not only decorating the surface. Perhaps it would also make designers and makers more responsible, after having to reflect on their own artistic work, as their work and methods are questioned and not only taken as visual stimuli.

Then there are mediators, who are trained within academia, but have an understanding of the design and contemporary craft. A fascinating person to talk to within the contemporary craft and design landscape is Katarina Siltavuori. Including her in my analysis gives us an insight to mediation; she has grown into the craft and design culture, has worked in the art gallery world, both within private and publicly funded projects, as an art and design critic, as well as has led her own gallery. Her perspective to this thesis is interesting, as she represents the art historian point of view in an intersection of contemporary craft and arts. She has seen the development of the field and understands the complex systems in which contemporary craft lands within fine arts. The main difference from other mediators interviewed is that she is not a maker herself, and therefore has the observer role. People like Siltavuori are an important addition to the contemporary craft field, because there is not that much research, critics or critical curating done within the field. There are several reasons for that, one of them being that the current education system is not unfortunately fostering a culture of conversation and self-reflection in relation to the field as a whole.

Siltavuori grew up surrounded by the Finnish craft and design community in Fiskars. She studied art history and was interested in architecture.⁹⁵ After graduating from Åbo Akademi, she worked as an art and design critic. In the beginning, she worked in the contemporary art milieu, in galleries such as Galerie Forsblom and Anhava, but shifted slowly towards contemporary craft in her writings and work projects. Siltavuori started the gallery Norsu⁹⁶ in 2005 and the gallery was operating until 2011. The general atmosphere was vivid in the contemporary craft field in 2005; several groups led by young makers, such as *Imu design* and *Anteeksi* laid a receptive climate for a new contemporary craft gallery. Space was provided by the Nordic

⁹⁵ Katarina Siltavuori, in discussion with the author, May 2020.

⁹⁶ Galleria Norsu = Norden + Suomi



Fig. 14 Katarina Siltavuori has been appointed Director of Archinfo in the summer of 2020. Photography by Irene Träskman, from <https://archinfo.fi/en/2020/06/katarina-siltavuori-appointed-director-of-archinfo-finland/>

Investment Bank (NIB) in Kaisaniemi, Helsinki. Siltavuori took the lead and the *Society for New Craft* was established to run the gallery space. Given the space, the gallery did a lot of nordic collaborations with other Nordic countries and the funding came from Finnish and other Nordic funds. The Gallery operated for five years taking active part in international fairs, for example *Collect: The International Art Fair for Contemporary Objects* – but eventually had to close down due to lack of finances.

From her experience as a gallerist for contemporary craft, she mentioned a few important notes as a mediator and the need for mediators. The role of a mediator is crucial in many cases, but the relationship between the artists and the mediators are not completely problem-free. Firstly, the artists should be willing to recognize the monetary value of the mediation tasks. Secondly, Siltavuori argues that problems occur when artists do not respect the pricing advice and sell their art with the different price in every location, even from their own studios. As discussed with Hagelstam, the relationship of artists and gallerists are based on trust rather than extensive contracts, by respecting the pricing the artists are doing a favor for the gallerists and other mediators. Siltavuori has also noticed that the financial issues touch contemporary craft more often, than for example contemporary art. This is due to several reasons, but one problem is that contemporary craft cannot be priced as high as contemporary art. This is a complex issue and would require another paper to discuss, but it is directly linked to the issues following the pricing system; when prices are lower, the production rate should be a little faster, according to Siltavuori. This means that contemporary craft artists should be flexible when the opportunity of big sales comes to board. A big order can't wait too much longer than a small one. Perhaps it means asking for other hands to help, which is sometimes difficult for artists working with their hands.

As we can see, the mediators are scattered and not a unified group of organizations and individuals. In this chapter it is my attempt to identify some key players in the field, and organize them in a convivial manner. I have decided to divide the mediators into non-profit, for profit and independent mediators. As I am presenting the mediators, I am also analyzing the scale of their operations and what kind of portion of their efforts are directed to benefit contemporary craft. I am also noting that all these mediators are contributing to “place-making”, a concept discussed and further developed by doctoral researcher Namkuy Chun. In essence, this means lifting Helsinki onto the map through design. All for-profit mediators are recognizing the small market of Finland, and present themselves as cosmopolitan organizations.

6

Studying the mediator; UU Market, Imu design and Lokal

In this chapter I am introducing the mediators I have chosen as my case studies and analyzing their operations, background, and motivations in relation to each other and the context of Helsinki. This is a small sample of mediators who use different tools in terms of promoting art and design, but they all have in common an interest in supporting the not yet established designers. What connects these mediators is their passion for supporting young artists and makers. They all share the values of helping others, empathy and collaboration. These values are also what drew me towards them.

6.1. Introducing the mediators

Imu Design

Imu design is a collective of independent designers and agents in the design field in Helsinki. They are not a registered company, but an organically formed and functioning group of three people with a similar interest in supporting young designers. While their focus is not in contemporary craft, but rather furniture design, I wanted to interview them because they also offer a venue for contemporary craft artists. The start of their journey in 2002 defines their working methods to this day. Imu design has managed to create a sustainable, light-structured organization that fills the ultimate goal of mediation - offering a curated, low threshold yet semi-exclusive exposure for unknown designers. With fairly low effort from their part, they are offering their expertise and networks for people who are still building their brand.

“It (Imu Design) is, in a way, a stepping stone for one's own designerhood..”⁹⁷

Imu design was established with the encouragement of an Aalto University (at the time University of Art and Design Helsinki) professor, who suggested Elina Aalto and Krista Kosonen to work together for the benefit of their peers. With the support of the Department of Design and the encourage-

⁹⁷ Krista Kosonen, (Member of Imu Design) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

“Se on niinku ikään kuin sellanen ponnahduslauta ikään ku omaan sellaseen suunnittelijuuteen..”

ment extending all the way to Yrjö Sotamaa, the then rector of the University of Art and Design, Imu organized their first exhibition in London in 2002.⁹⁸ All together, they have organized five trips to international fairs, promoting young Finnish designers over the course of ten years. Nowadays they focus on their collaboration with the annual furniture fair Habitare. They are the longest operating organization out of the three case studies.

Imu design consists of three designers, design researchers and educators, Elina Aalto, Krista Kosonen and Saara Renvall.⁹⁹ They all work on their individual projects, but come together annually to curate Talentshop and Protoshop at the Habitare fair. Protoshop is a student exhibition, a collection of 10-12 new ideas that have potential to be manufactured. Every year, they receive around 140 product proposals (one can send several). Within these proposals and through juried selection, they form a cohesive fair booth representing the newest and most exciting ideas in the field. Talentshop, on the other hand is a platform that exhibits four designers who are not yet well established but have a strong design identity. This means, that they already have a body of work that can occupy the space provided. It also means that their designs can be more artistic and do not necessarily aim for mass production. The Talentshop is especially a great opportunity for contemporary craft artists, as it is not expected to have furniture ready for market, but to exhibit individual and courageous designs. The funding support and marketing efforts come from the Habitare furniture fair, which makes the efforts of the mediators worthwhile as well.¹⁰⁰

From the outside, it might be a little difficult to get an overall understanding of what Imu design really is. Their website exists, but is not updated anymore, except the annual competition calls for Proto- and Talentshops.¹⁰¹ In essence, Imu design is Elina Aalto, Krista Kosonen and Saara Renvall curating Talent- and Protoshop. Their success is based on a long lasting partnership with Habitare, that is supported by their teaching roles in institutions such as Aalto University and their successful personal careers as designers. This gives them an up to date understanding of the design currents within the recent graduates and with their long careers in the field. They have an ability to recognize new ideas and points of view, and with their expertise, can curate a cohesive overview of today's talents. Because the students do not have to fulfill all of the industry's requirements, they can have a fresh point of view and therefore they usually end up being the most interesting booths at the furniture fairs. Essentially as mediators, Imu

⁹⁸ Krista Kosonen, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

⁹⁹ Krista Kosonen, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Elina Aalto, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

¹⁰¹ Krista Kosonen, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

design's mediation is directed towards the industry, but reaches a general public interested in design.



Fig 15. Imu design: Saara Renvall, Krista Kosonen and Elina Aalto. Photography: A-Lehdet.



Fig 16. Protoshop at Habitare Furniture fair. Protoshop is a curated exhibition of pioneering design from young designers. Photographed by Maija Astikainen From <https://mediabank.messukeskus.com/kuvat/Habitare/Habitare+19/Habitare2019-9834-Maija+Astikainen.jpg>



Fig 17. Talentshop at Habitare furniture fair. Here, the booth of Teemu Salonen in 2018. From https://mediabank.messukeskus.com/kuvat/Habitare/Kuvat+Habitare+18+%7C+Photos+Habitare+18/69992_habitare_2018-1002-Edit.jpg



Fig 18. Katja Hagelstam photographed by Ananya Tantt. From <https://www.institut-finlandais.fr/fi/blog/2018/09/01/kuukauden-vieras-syyskuu-2018-katja-hagelstam/>

Lokal concept store

Lokal is a gallery and a concept store located on Annankatu in Helsinki. It started as a curious project by founder, curator, and photographer Katja Hagelstam. In 2012 After working as a freelance photographer for years, she realised that she had gathered quite an extensive network of creative individuals in Helsinki. It all started from a book project *20+12 Muotoilutarinaa Helsingistä*¹⁰², where Katja visited and photographed makers of Helsinki. She had always dreamed of having a little gallery or a boutique and decided to start one in a pop-up form. However, after working so hard on the pop-up, she felt that all the work would go to waste, and that she needed something more permanent.

Lokal has a key role in the Finnish design and contemporary craft landscape. They are highly reputable and appreciated within the Helsinki design scene, as they are one of the only galleries dedicated to contemporary craft. For instance, Lokal has been awarded the Finnish State Design Award in 2017 and was granted the Finnish Design Deed Award in 2015.¹⁰³ Hagelstam has managed to create an internationally acknowledged space, of which is unique in the Helsinki design scene. For example, the global affairs and lifestyle magazine Monocle has written about Lokal in their articles about Helsinki and in their Helsinki travel guide.¹⁰⁴ Lokal moves between traditional art gallery, a concept store, and doing projects in collaboration with other mediating institutions. They have a unique voice and aesthetics and a strong brand that is based on the curation of Katja Hagelstam. For example, when I think of Lokal, I instantly think of a certain color scheme and material palette.

It is almost like Katja creates these home-like sceneries for people to admire. This stems from her background as a photographer. In the interview with her, she referred to her work as being a kind of 3D photography. As a gallerist promoting contemporary craft, this is quite clever and above all important, as it places the items already in a home, where they should be seen. Perhaps a white cube would not work the same way, it would detach the objects from their original intended use, to have them at home to admire and appreciate.

¹⁰² "Lokalin matkassa", accessed August 3, 2020, <https://designdistrict.fi/fi/jasentarinat/lokalin-matkassa/>

¹⁰³ "About Lokal", accessed August 3, 2020, <https://lokalhelsinki.com/all-content/about-lokal/>

¹⁰⁴ "Christmas shopping in Helsinki", accessed September 12, <https://monocle.com/film/entertaining/christmas-shopping-in-helsinki/>

Among changing, home-like group exhibitions, Lokal has organised six editions of the exhibition *Bloom* which is reserved for new rising talents in the field of contemporary craft, art, and design. The exhibition takes place during the Helsinki Design Week, which is the best time to have works exhibited in one of the only galleries in Helsinki focusing on contemporary craft.

Lokal is working in collaboration with several creative institutions, curating exhibitions, exhibiting Finnish designers abroad, and taking part in round tables in symposiums. For example, among others Hagelstam has curated several exhibitions for the Institut Finlandais in Paris and in collaboration with the Finnish Institute Benelux based in Brussels.

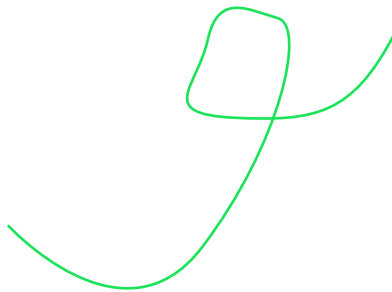


Fig 19. A view of Lokal Concept store on Annankatu 9 in Helsinki. "If one must buy an object, buy an object that matters.", states the website of Lokal. From <https://lokalhelsinki.com/all-content/about-lokal/>



Fig 20. Hannakaisa Pekkala, CEO of UU Market. Photography by Janne Naakka. From <https://uumarket.fi/pages/about-us>

UU Market

UU Market is an online sales platform, exhibiting young artists and designers. According to UU Market's CEO Hanna-Kaisa Pekkala, they are a service directed to designers, as well as the general public. For the public, they offer a curated selection of today's makers' products online, but are also present in sale events and fairs in Finland and abroad. For designers, they offer a platform to be visible and perform sales online. UU Market is the newest member to the mediation field in the Helsinki design scene, and is still adjusting their functions to best serve their representatives and consumers. In the past year, they have geared their functions more towards agency work, which means taking part in events and curating exhibitions at external sites. For example, in spring 2020 they collaborated with Institut Finlandais, the Finnish cultural institute in Paris, by organizing an exhibition *Nouvelle Saison*.

Their journey to mediation started from a thesis work which discussed an online concept store distributing small production series. The idea developed after discussing with other colleagues and took the first step to become a registered company in 2017. The core group consists of all Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts alumni. For example, designer Milla Vaahtera has worked as a mentor, extending her networks and giving advice.¹⁰⁵ What is unique about their platform, is that they do not have a central distribution system. Once a client makes an order on their website, it is shipped directly from the maker to the client. The designers represented are mostly recent graduates or young designers. At the time of writing this thesis, on their website's "Makers" section, they have 36 designers.

¹⁰⁵ Hannakaisa Pekkala, in discussion with the author, January 2020.



Fig 21. UU Market and their new showroom, at Atelje Töölö. Photography by Viivi Lehto, courtesy of UU Market.



Fig 22. UU Market, and artworks represented at their online exhibition *Nouvelle Saison* in conjunction with Institut Finlandais. Photography by Hannakaisa Pekkala from <https://www.institut-finlandais.fr/fi/projektit/if-galerie/nouvelle-saison/>.

6.2 Analyzing the operations of and financial independence

In this subchapter I am discussing the similarities and differences of these three independent mediator communities. I am looking into the platforms they are using, what kind of support networks they have and then also the internal operating models.

Lokal and Imu Design are both operating closely with a fixed physical space in which makers can exhibit their works. UU Market, being the youngest of the three, was established to have a strong online presence. From the outside, UU Market seems to have the clearest business plan, perhaps because they are a new business. However, they are still looking for their place in the field and currently UU Market is steering towards agency work, for example, representing the artists in fairs.¹⁰⁶ According to Pekkala, this stems from recognizing that as an online platform they cannot attract enough attention to their designers. Based on the discussion with Hagelstam she gives the impression that Lokal has a flexible business plan and a relaxed attitude in running the business. They have established themselves as part of the Helsinki contemporary craft landscape, but do not do much market research as all of their manpower goes into operations.¹⁰⁷ Imu design is an association, with no business oriented goals, such as sales or growth. Their platform allows the members to collaborate with each other and Habitare, but they do not actively work together outside Imu design. Lokal and UU Market are open and flexible for new collaborations and projects. All of the three interviewees have been exhibiting in international fairs.

In terms of financial independence, UU Market and Lokal are based on sales. UU market has next to no external financial support, whereas Lokal and Imu design rely or have relied in the past on grants. In discussion with Lokal, annual working grants from TAIKE¹⁰⁸ have helped to run the operations immensely. Another big financial support has come from subsidies from the Ministry of Education and Culture, in the form of a nonrecurring grant that focused on mediation and internationalisation. Imu design is no longer relying on grants, but received them in the beginning of their path. Support can come in other forms too, for example, as collaborations where another institution offers an exhibition space and the mediators take care of the curating. Imu Design has established a strong liaison with the Habitare fair, and also gets funding through that channel.¹⁰⁹ In the Proto- and Taletshop jury they collaborate with *Glorian Koti* – design magazine.

¹⁰⁶ Hannakaisa Pekkala, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Katja Hagelstam, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

¹⁰⁸ TAIKE = Taiteen edistämiskeskus, in english Arts Promotion Centre Finland

¹⁰⁹ Krista Kosonen, (Member of Imu Design) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

Krista Kosonen:

For three years we received good grants, but the grant systems are not built to fund annual operations, so we lost those money pipes eventually, which is completely understandable.¹¹⁰

To my great surprise, none of the mediators I discussed with are practising solely as a mediator. They all have their personal careers in the creative field. This came as a surprise, as judging from the outside, it seems like a lot of work to put up exhibitions and promote others. It became evident that running a mediating company is not a highly profitable business. As Kosonen points out in the interview, the current grant systems in Finland are not built to support a long term mediation business, even if they first seem excited to help finance the efforts.

Out of all my case studies, UU Market has the most business-forward mindset, which came through the language used in the interview. Being also the youngest of the three case studies, they are still in the process of defining their business model. UU Market believes in organic growth, meaning that they will use limited resources of time and effort to mediate, this meaning that they are not growing at a fast pace. The limitations are formed, as there is only one person dedicated to the daily processes of the company who also needs other sources of income. However, their long term goals lie in the growing of their business and eventually having their own showroom. They recognize that for now it might mean focusing more on agency work, such as curating and representing makers in the art and design fairs. The online shop format has not proven to be a lucrative business and the reasons are obvious; according to UU Market, when it comes to contemporary craft and small series productions, the clients want to feel and see the crafted pieces. Perhaps also the abundance of already existing online shops will make it hard to truly stand out from the crowd.

Pekkala discussed in her interview that it is hard to put a price on the mediation work.¹¹¹ However, she found that it is good sometimes for the mediators to price their services, as often it is not seen or it is forgotten that the

¹¹⁰ Krista Kosonen, (Member of Imu Design) in discussion with the author, January 2020.

“... kolme vuotta me saatiin tosi hyvin apurahoja mut sit ku ne systeemithän ei oo raken-
nettu silleen et ne rahottais vuosittaista toimintaa et sit ne rahahanat meni kiinni, mikä on
ihan ymmärrettävää”

¹¹¹ Hannakaisa Pekkala, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

mediation also takes time and effort. As an example, when discussing a two hundred euro application fee for the *Bloom* exhibition (for young designers), she said that it is a good, visible reminder of the importance of their work. Later when discussing with Lokal about the exhibition fee, I learned that the fee was put in place, as the educational institutions who had previously taken part in funding, had discontinued their monetary support. The educational institutions wanted to encourage the students to apply for grants to take part in the exhibition, instead of offering support directly to the exhibition organizers. This is very unfortunate, and shows shortsightedness from the Aalto University institution. The support would have benefited directly their students.

To what extent is contemporary craft then part of commercial activities? Again, we see that contemporary craft operates between two systems, where most of its practitioners form their income similarly to all other freelance artists and the expectations to sell their art as commercial activity. Why should contemporary craft artists then be supported by grant systems? Simply, because the price point of the objects sold tend to be very low, and the volumes very small. Even if there is a big order, it often happens suddenly, and the contemporary craft artists are expected to be flexible.¹¹² The grants bring support and stability for work life, which is often unpredictable. A bigger question will be how the whole creative field will adjust to the recent developments in the state funding for arts.

A further question could be, what is then an appropriate funding channel for mediators? Should it be the general public, the artists themselves or grant systems? Mediation is a service directed to designers, the professional network, general public, and contemporary craft collectors. As of now, the funding for mediation work comes from various sources and is still done a lot with volunteering work. The grants tend to help in the beginning, but are not a long term solution for a business. The buying power of collectors is big, but they are small in numbers. The general public is not a sufficient source for support, which is a sum of several things: mass production, lack of appreciation for handmade, and the trends of decluttering. The mediators, who have managed to create a long term solution for their funding have very light structures and very clear operating systems. For example, Imu design with their annual collaboration with Habitare and Helsinki Design District with their membership fees and simple marketing tools.

¹¹² Katarina Siltavuori, in discussion with the author, May 2020.

6.3 A brief discussion on gender

Another common factor is that all three mediator organizations are led by women. This was a pure coincidence when choosing the case studies, but also an interesting one, and leads to ask why it is that the mediators are indeed often women? At this point, it is appropriate to consider design history and theory in the perspective of a feminist lense. Cheryl Buckley decodes the exclusion of women in the written history of design in her essay *Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design*. Buckley argues that design historians and institutions fail to acknowledge patriarchy¹¹³, and the framework it creates for female designers and agents working within design. In this framework, “women occupy the space left by men”.¹¹⁴ In the context of contemporary craft, it also means that craft is often left out of the canon of design history, and therefore leaves out women’s perspective.

Patriarchy has circumscribed women’s opportunities to participate fully in all areas of society and, more specifically, in all sectors of design, through a variety of means – institutional, societal, economic, psychological, and historical. The resulting female stereotypes delineate certain modes of behavior for women.¹¹⁵

In the culture of design, and contemporary craft mediating, perhaps the women stereotypically nurturing have filled the positions of mediators, because they were left empty by men. While women might be filling positions that men have rejected, I dare to argue that it is not only a negative thing. Mediators as curators possess power, and can work as agitators for change. By being sensible to oppressive structures and symbolic violence¹¹⁶ the mediators can, on their part, change the status quo. For example, mediators make a conscious decision when choosing to represent an array of people from different backgrounds, including all sexes, of all races, classes, and nationalities. Again, this can be done with quiet activism, and does not have to be underlined in the exhibition catalogue, for example.

All three case studies are run by creative people for creative people. While all the three organizations do have some business activity, and they share some similar values, they are established in different times, emerging from

¹¹³ Cheryl Buckley, “Made in Patriarchy: Toward a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design,” *Design Issues* 3, no. 2 (1986): p. 254.

¹¹⁴ Buckley, 254.

¹¹⁵ Buckley, 252.

¹¹⁶ Joanna Boehnert, and Dimeji Onafuwa. “Design as Symbolic Violence: Reproducing the ‘Isms’ + A Framework for Allies.” *Intersectional Perspectives on Design, Politics and Power*, (Malmö: Malmö University, 2015) 1.

particular cultural atmospheres. Imu design and UU Market have essentially developed from student projects with the support and encouragement of academic institutions. Lokal has emerged from the personal project of Katja Hagelstam, with an attempt to create a platform for contemporary craft artists and small series producers. What is common in all three, is the waking up to recognize the need for exposure for young designers. As Elina Aalto from Imu design put it, it is much easier for a young designer to take part in fairs where the responsibilities are divided.¹¹⁷

All of the three case study mediators are quite different in operations and focus stakeholders, but have in common their attempt to keep a low-threshold stepping stone for young designers. Apart from UU design, others do not have hopes of expanding their functions. Lokal wishes to sustain the day-to-day operations without a constant struggle of money. Imu design has the longest operating project and it seems that longevity of the mediation projects is based on the simplicity of the project. They are projects of designers to designers, led by women. Their common values are discussed in the next subchapters.

6.3 Motivations and ethics of mediation

Based on all my three interviews, it became quite clear that the work is heavily value based. As it is essentially about human interactions, I am reflecting if the mediation can be completely unbiased and democratic.

A member of Imu design calls the work *kulttuuriteko*.¹¹⁸ There is no direct translation in English, but essentially it means a cultural act for greater good. *Kulttuuriteko* is based on values rather than growth of business.¹¹⁹ The notion of selflessness and helping others rose as an important factor within the value systems of the three case studies. After their recognition of lack of platforms for young designers, their doing something about it is fuelled by the mediators' personal fulfillment when being able to help others. I agree that the mediators are creating *kulttuuriteko*, as these mediators have an important role in launching the careers of designers, yet the value is not easily measured. When observing the designers that Imu design has represented, one can spot a long list of now established designers.

¹¹⁷ Elina Aalto (Member of Imu design), in discussion with the author, January 2020.

¹¹⁸ A Cultural act for greater good. Translated from english by Kati Peltola.

¹¹⁹ Krista Kosonen (Imu design), in discussion with the author, January 2020.

“Koska me ei myydä. Ja me ei niinku .. ku tää on niinku kulttuuriteko mun mielestä enemmän. Tavallaan.. kun semmonen myyntiin ja kasvuun.. Arvoihin pohjautuvaa.”

Imu Design recognises the value in their work:

For example, I have been thinking that we should write a book. Really, because we have had such a big impact on Finnish design and how it is viewed, I think we should make a book about our history and leave this kind of cultural heritage.¹²⁰

As mentioned before, when asked why the mediators are often designers, or work within the creative field, interviewees argued that there might be two reasons. Firstly, the design market in Finland is small. This leads into a situation, that when there are few chances for designers, some decide to do something about it. Someone who is already in the same situation, can understand the struggle of a young designer. Secondly this understanding leads to empathy towards the young makers. The mediator needs to get personal gratification from helping others, as a lot of it is done with very limited funding and sometimes with volunteer work. For example, Lokal is able to pay one full-time employee, the Gallery Manager.¹²¹ This is quite disappointing to hear, if you think about the importance of Lokal as a hub of contemporary craft in Helsinki. According to Hagelstam, ideally she could employ three full time positions, to run the Gallery and all external projects.

Mediation work is also based on being with people. All interviewees mentioned that an important skill when doing mediation work is being able to get along with many different kinds of people. It is also an example of empathy as a mediator; without massive personal financial gain these mediators are pushing other artists and advancing their careers. All the interviewees suggested that they do not look at the age or school background when assessing artists works. It is a noble thing to do, but it is impossible not to think how much the personal relationships affect the mediation work. It is part of our human nature. I assume that it is impossible to be completely unbiased and objective. Design journalist Hannu Pöppönen discusses democracy when choosing designers for exhibitions with design journalist Kaj Kalin in his book *Designkuplia*. He states that his choice to give one

¹²⁰ Krista Kosonen (Imu design), in discussion with the author, January 2020.

“Esimerkiksi mä oon miettiny et meidän pitäis tehdä kirja. Oikeesti, koska siis me ollaan kuitenkin vaikuttettu niin paljon suomalaisen muotoilun, miten sitä katsotaan ja meidän pitäis mun mielestä tehdä ihan niinku tästä meidän historiasta ja jättää tällainen kulttuuriperintö.”

¹²¹ Katja Hagelstam, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

designer a full exhibition hall was by no means a democratic decision, but a conscious non-democratic decision.¹²² Kalin continues, that it is one of the things he learned from Gummerus¹²³; one should not be democratic, “but use psychological eye” and choose the designers who are at the “olympic level”. In Gummerus’ words, he would have never lobbied Finnish design with such success if he would have been democratic.¹²⁴ Of course, this kind of rhetoric refers to the time when one individual designer is pushed to stardom to carry a message for a whole nation. While Finnish design history relies a lot on these stars, this is not the goal of the mediators interviewed for this thesis. The designer stardom seems to be outdated as an idea, at least in the public discussion of design. However, structures like “Young Designer of the Year” chosen by the Design Forum Finland, speak a different truth.

6.5 Credibility and brand building

Through the interviews I noticed that all of the three mediators have had to also build a strong brand for themselves in order to be able to be a credible curator within the Finnish design bubble. The credibility needs to be gained from two directions, from the designers as well as the art viewers and the general public. Some have done it more organically, and others with more intention.

In the case of Imu design, credibility has been formed through consistent visibility in the field and word-of-mouth.¹²⁵ Imu design was established in the time when the importance of online presence was not as crucial as today. Therefore, they have not even seen it as important to build one later on. Their reputation as professionals and curators of design, along with their strong liaisons with Habitare are strong enough to sustain their work.

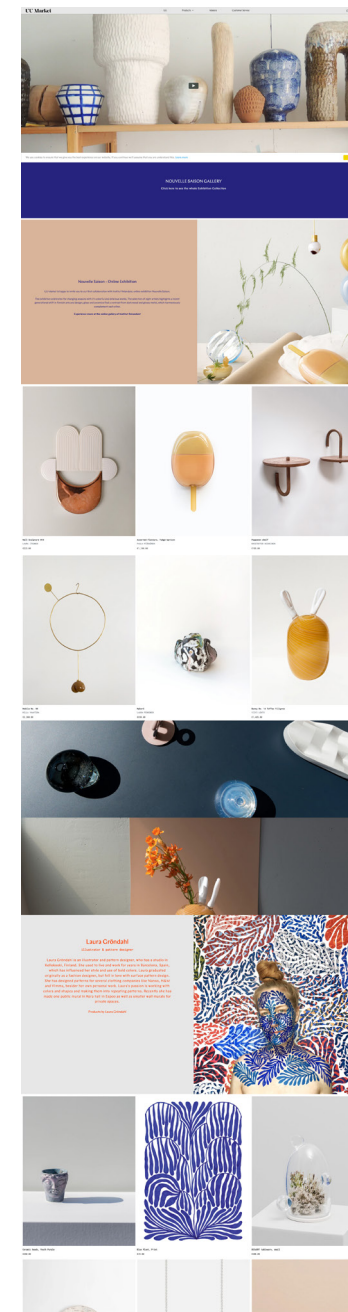
For UU Market and Lokal, an important factor in this brand building is the aesthetic appearance in the eyes of the public. Lokal’s exhibitions in their gallery in Annankatu work as a window to their aesthetics. UU Market

¹²² Hannu Pöppönen. *Designkuplia: Suomalaisen Muotoilun ilmiöitä*. (Helsinki: Aalto ARTS Books, 2013.), 86.

¹²³ Herman Olof Gummerus is discussed in depth in the chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹²⁴ Pöppönen, 86.

¹²⁵ Krista Kosonen (Imu design), in discussion with the author, January 2020.



founders found it important to build a strong brand from the beginning by having a website that reflects their aesthetic and attracts designers to be part of their community.¹²⁶ They also found it important to get some more established designers in their community, to then attract others to join. It also builds the credibility of them as curators in the eyes of the art viewers.

¹²⁶ Hannakaisa Pekkala, in discussion with the author, January 2020.

Fig 23. UU Market Website in September 2020. Screenshot from <https://uumarket.fi/>



Fig 24. Lokal and the *Bloom* exhibition in 2018 showcasing the young designers under 30 years of age. From <https://lokalhelsinki.com/all-content/exhibition-53-bloom/>

Lokal's aesthetic is very subtle, home-like and calm. In their exhibitions one can see more risks, in terms of color. Unlike UU Market, Lokal does not rely so much on the trends, but forms a visual language of their own that has lasted time. Their premises work as a neutral canvas for the art, but the home-like atmosphere allows the art to be imagined at home.

To stay topical and to be able to curate an exhibition, one needs to have a certain level of understanding of aesthetics and other currents in the field. This can be gained through scouting, which all of the interviewees mention as their tool. By scouting, I am referring to mediators visiting events, and for example, inviting and encouraging students to take part in juried exhibition calls. While it is not often done consciously, all interviewees said that it is important to visit events and to see what is happening in the field. Also organising exhibitions such as Lokal's *Bloom* (for artists under 30-years old) or Imu designs's Protoshop allows them to receive an array of works of

current young designers in form of applications. Through this they can have a snapshot of what is out there and what are the current trends in thinking and making.

It also seems to be important that the case studies stand independently away from school institutions. While for example UU Market and Imu Design have been established within the art school environment, they do not actively advertise it. Imu Design representatives mentioned in the interview that it was actually important to be recognized as independent agents in the international fairs, and not attached to an institution. It gave a sense of pride to Imu Design, and credibility in the eyes of professional fair visitors.

On the other hand, it is impossible and not even necessary to stand completely alone, with no connections to design schools. In a way, Lokal, UU Market, and Imu design work as stepping stones for a student from a design school to the professional market. Therefore they should gain support from the establishments like Aalto University or Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts. This is imperative, as there are almost no other big, organized design events for young designers. For example, Pöppönen discusses with nostalgia about events such as Nuorten Forum¹²⁷ (Youth Forum) or Aalto University's Master's exhibitions, which are both no longer organized. He argues that these are a great loss for the young artists. He admits, that while no research has been performed of the actual outcome of these types of events for the young designers, at least it gave an opportunity to connect with professionals.

This chapter discusses topics findings and results of my analysis of the interviews. After introducing the case studies, I am discussing their operational models and aspirations for the future. I am also briefly discussing gender, as all my case study subjects happened to be women. What does it say about contemporary craft? Craft in general is not talked about in the design history, as it often is a female driven field. To continue the discussion, I consider the motivations to mediate, and come to the conclusion that they are not based on income, but rather on a genuine aspiration to help others, and be with people. Finally, I analyse the role of mediator within the society, and how they need to establish themselves as part of the community, and gain credibility both within the bubble as well as outside of it.

¹²⁷ Pöppönen, 239.

As much as this thesis states that mediation as a job is based on values, it also stems from urgency to change things for oneself and their community. Perhaps it stems from anxiety to some level also, as the entrepreneur lifestyle is so unpredictable. The mediators I discuss are all creators and entrepreneurs themselves; with the time left in their hand they have chosen to create those opportunities to others that they did not have. At the same time, they all want to keep creating, resulting in a situation where they cannot fully immerse themselves into mediating, and perhaps due to the same reason cannot grow. The independent curators who emerge from academia, art historians, for example, enjoy a different kind of motivation and credibility gained through other kinds of accomplishments, and the value they create is also measured differently.

To create meaningful art requires time. Time to research, to question, to develop the mind and reflect back to create art that has something to say. In a way, it is quite the opposite of the current state of how students are prepared in Aalto University, for example. Do the contemporary design students really know how to talk about their art beyond the materiality of it? Are they even given the time to do that? The mediation in an ideal state would free the artists from some of the entrepreneurial clutter, therefore establishing time for creating. Also grants can provide a similar freedom for creative time. Unfortunately, even the grant systems are in danger for the cultural sector in Finland. The state grants are funded mostly by the Finnish government-owned betting agency. Close to 1 billion euros from the revenue of Veikkaus is circulating back to sport, culture and science in the form of grants, for example.¹²⁸ The recent discussion that Veikkaus will withdraw thousands of gambling machines¹²⁹, will eventually impact the funding of culture, art, and contemporary craft. The director of TAIKE, Paula Tuovinen believes that the recent developments will force the rethinking of funding system politics.¹³⁰ Tuovinen also has been an advocate for state paid artist's salary, which would replace the current grant systems and would allow a stronger social status for artists.¹³¹ From a mediator's point of view, stabili-

128 "Mikä Veikkaus on" Veikkaus, accessed September 20, 2020. <https://www.veikkaus.fi/fi/yritys#/yritystietoa/mika-veikkaus-on>

129 Aromaa, Jonni. "Taiteilija Voi Tulla Suomessa Toimeen Lähinnä Uudellamaalla", Sanoo Rahoituksen Aitiopaikalla Istuva Paula Tuovinen," 2020. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11505111>.

130 Aromaa, Jonni. "Taiteilija Voi Tulla Suomessa Toimeen Lähinnä Uudellamaalla", Sanoo Rahoituksen Aitiopaikalla Istuva Paula Tuovinen," 2020. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11505111>.

131 Aromaa, Jonni. "Taiteilija Voi Tulla Suomessa Toimeen Lähinnä Uudellamaalla",

zation of the grant system would also secure their income, as artists could pay for their services. This conversation will be an interesting one to follow, because it touches on the whole cultural sector and will determine the future of so many makers and artists. I am hoping that this thesis could be an avenue to start a conversation within the contemporary craft community. I am hoping we can all acknowledge that we should foster a culture of critical conversations. Through this, we could establish a more secure place within the cultural sector, and hence take a stronger stand in valuing contemporary craft

The limits of this research were lack of existing research and experience. My research was conducted in an organic manner, with an openness that comes with it. Of course, looking back there are several things I would have done differently, but my results would most likely have stayed more or less the same. In order to dig deeper into the subjects I would have formulated my interviews a little better, and would have let the interviewers talk more. There is also some level of bias, as I am also writing from inside the design bubble. Next time, I would make an effort to completely strip off all prejudice. I am also wondering, if the thesis has fulfilled the aim to shed a light on a territory that is unknown for some.

For the future, I am hoping that this thesis opens venues for contemporary craft. This is a preliminary mapping of the mediators and the field, and could be pushed further by others. The context is limited to Helsinki, it would be really interesting to do some comparative research between other countries. This could also work as a groundwork for someone with a more business oriented background. Ideally, it could be used as a starting point for thinking of new funding systems for the contemporary craft field.

Sanoo Rahoituksen Aitiopaikalla Istuva Paula Tuovinen," 2020. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11505111>.

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Images

Fig 1. A diagram of the worlds of Finnish handicraft and its surroundings. Anna-Marja, Ihatsu. *Craft, Art-Craft or Craft-Design?: in Pursuit of the British Equivalent for the Finnish Concept 'käsiyö'* (Joensuu: Joensuu yliopisto, 1998.), 44.

Fig 2. The world of 'contemporary craft' with its two dimensions. Anna-Marja, Ihatsu. *Craft, Art-Craft or Craft-Design?: in Pursuit of the British Equivalent for the Finnish Concept 'käsiyö'* (Joensuu: Joensuu yliopisto, 1998.), 156.

Fig 3. An example of the zones of purports for 'craft' and 'käsiyö' Anna-Marja, Ihatsu. *Craft, Art-Craft or Craft-Design?: in Pursuit of the British Equivalent for the Finnish Concept 'käsiyö'* (Joensuu: Joensuu yliopisto, 1998.), 124.

Fig 4. At Ornamo Art & Design Sale. Photographed by Minna Kurjenluoma (2020) From Ornamo, <https://www.ornamo.fi/fi/artikkeli/ornamon-teosmyynnin-satoa/>.

Fig 5. The direction of mediation. Created by the author.

Fig 6. H. O. Gummerus. From Aav, Marianne and Viljanen, Eeva. *Herman Olof Gummerus – muotoilun diplomaatti*, Helsinki: Design Museo, 2009.

Fig 9. *Tuonelan virta* by Tapio Wirkkala advert. From Aav, Marianne and Viljanen, Eeva. *Herman Olof Gummerus – muotoilun diplomaatti*, Helsinki: Design Museo, 2009.

Fig 10. Finnish Spirit. From <https://www.instagram.com/finnishspirit/?hl=fi>.

Fig 11. *Beat-pollinators' nest residence* by Aura Latva-Somppi, Photo courtesy of Tuo Tuo Kulttuuri Tila, from <https://www.tuotuoarts.com/news>

Fig 12. A cropped shot of the Design District of Helsinki, From <https://designdistrict.fi/fi/kartta/?filter=all>

Fig 13. Kia Evon, Thinking Outside the White Cube – Polemic Study of Contemporary Art Space; Valkoisen Kuution Polemiikki – Turkimus Nykytaiteen Tiloista. (Master's thesis, Aalto University, 2017), 21.

Fig 14. Irene Träskman. Katarina Siltavuori. Archinfo. from <https://archinfo.fi/en/2020/06/katarina-siltavuori-appointed-director-of-archinfo-finland/>

Fig 15. Imu design: Elina Aalto, Saara Renvall and Krista Kosonen. Photography: A-Lehdet.

Fig 16. Protoshop at Habitare Furniture fair. Photographed by Maija Astikainen From <https://mediabank.messukeskus.com/kuvat/Habitare/Habitare+19/Habitare2019-9834-Maija+Astikainen.jpg>

Fig 17. Talentshop at Habitare furniture fair. From https://mediabank.messukeskus.com/kuvat/Habitare/Kuvat+Habitare+18+%7C+Photos+Habitare+18/69992_habitare_2018-1002-Edit.jpg

Fig 18. Katja Hagelstam photographed by Ananya Tanttu. From <https://www.institut-finlandais.fr/fi/blog/2018/09/01/kuukauden-vieras-syyskuu-2018-katja-hagelstam/>

Fig 19. A view of Lokal Concept store on Annankatu 9 in Helsinki. From <https://lokalhelsinki.com/all-content/about-lokal/>

Fig 20. Hannakaisa Pekkala, CEO of UU Market. Photography by Janne Naakka. From <https://uumarket.fi/pages/about-us>

Fig 21. UU Market and their new showroom, at Atelje Töölö. Photography by Viivi Lehto, courtesy of UU Market.

Fig 22. UU Market, and artworks represented at their online exhibition “Nouvelle Saison” in conjunction with Institut finlandais. Photography by Hannakaisa Pekkala from <https://www.institut-finlandais.fr/fi/projektit/if-galerie/nouvelle-saison/>

Fig 23. UU Market Website in September 2020. Screenshot from <https://uumarket.fi/>

Fig 24. Lokal. Photo courtesy of Lokal. From <https://lokalhelsinki.com/all-content/exhibition-53-bloom/>

